

JULY / AUGUST 2011

IOWA OUTDOORS

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IN THIS ISSUE:

FOREST, GLADE AND CLIFF

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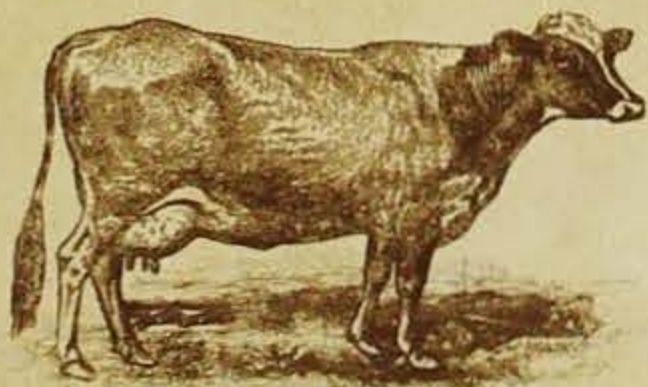
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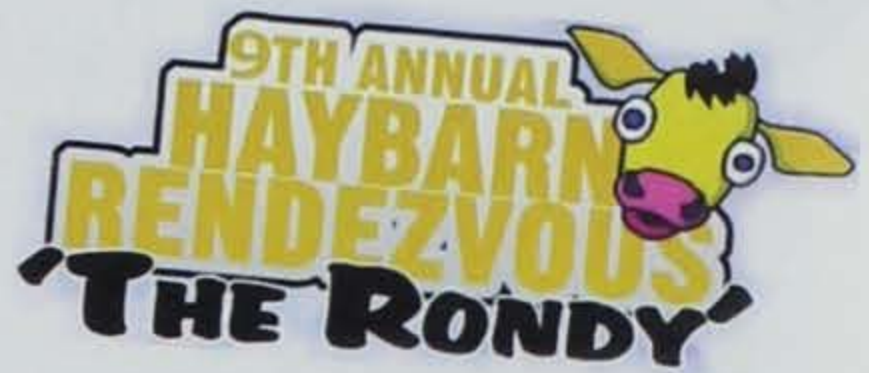


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DAVID WEISS, a writer from Ankeny, was born and raised in Mason City, and is a lifelong Iowa resident. His love of fishing and the outdoors was passed down from his father, an inheritance he gladly extends to his nine grandchildren. He has written more than two dozen children's books and recently completed his first full-length novel.



AUBREY C. WATSON is a freelance photographer and author and lives downriver in Nashville Tenn. He has published five books. His latest, *Nashville in Photographs*, is published by Random House and available online from Amazon.



LINDA AND ROBERT SCARTH of Cedar Rapids have awareness of those magic moments when small objects become beautiful. With a focus on Midwest flora and fauna,

their passion for the outdoors, coupled with patience and keen eye to detail, allows them to capture dazzling images of nature up close. Order their book, *Deep Nature Photography from Iowa*, from iowanaturestore.com or 1-866-410-0230.



SANDY FLAHIVE is a Des Moines writer who likes getting in 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.

IOWA OUTDOORS

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DNR MISSION

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

EDITORIAL MISSION

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

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The Keepers of the Land program matches volunteers with natural resource service needs statewide. Give back to Iowa's lands, waters and skies. Call 515-281-0878 to match your interests with needs or visit www.keepersoftheland.org.

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Charitable giving of land, funds, and goods and services greatly enhances Iowa's outdoor living. Contact: Kim Rasler at 515-281-7122.

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No larger than a shirt button, this endangered species is found in Iowa and virtually nowhere else.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO AND THE COVER

From the cover photo of a bee on a lead plant to the zebra spider shown this page, Robert and Linda Scarth of Cedar Rapids have an incredible eye for that magic moment when small becomes beautiful. Matched with patience and skill, they produce dazzling images of Iowa nature up close. Revealing the miniature beauties hidden among the patches of prairie, woodland and wetland that remain, their book *Deep Nature* contains 75 photographs that illustrate a cross section of the state's smallest inhabitants. From an iridescent fly hovering over a neon-purple fringed gentian, to coneflowers refracted in dewdrops, they have created a sparking jewelbox that will make us look at the small world around us with renewed appreciation.

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BY DAVID C. WEISS



at Seclusion om it All at a Paddle-in Campsite



ake advantage of several remote campsites, get surrounded by humans behind. The locations offers a wilderness-like experience in Iowa. This is one you can't get to by road. "You need," says Todd Robertson, a local coordinator. "These are for people who want to truly get away from it all and be self-reliant for their own water, often doing without modern conveniences."

In addition, two Polk County sites offer semi-secluded, less crowded paddle-in sites at **CHICHAQUA** and **YELLOW BANKS PARKS**. Making the river valley and surrounding area, Yellow Banks Park has a site

on the Des Moines River close to a boat ramp with toilets, mini shelter, fire rings and tables. Hike up the path a quarter-mile to showerhouses. The Chichaqua sites are on the Skunk River's east bank, upriver from the bridge on 118th Ave NE. Sites have mowed grass, fire rings and showerhouses a mile north at the main campground.

Yellow Banks Park, 6801 SE 32nd Ave., Pleasant Hill, 515-266-1563. Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, 8700 NE 126th Ave., Maxwell, 515-967-2596. www.conservationboard.org

For adventurers seeking bigger challenges, isolated sites at **LAKE RED ROCK** and **RATHBUN LAKE** offer true primitive paddle-in camping. Kayakers must be comfortable with large water, as wind-induced high waves and swells are possible. Two sites in rugged northeast Iowa on the Yellow River test abilities on a narrow, twisting river that demands solid command of your craft.



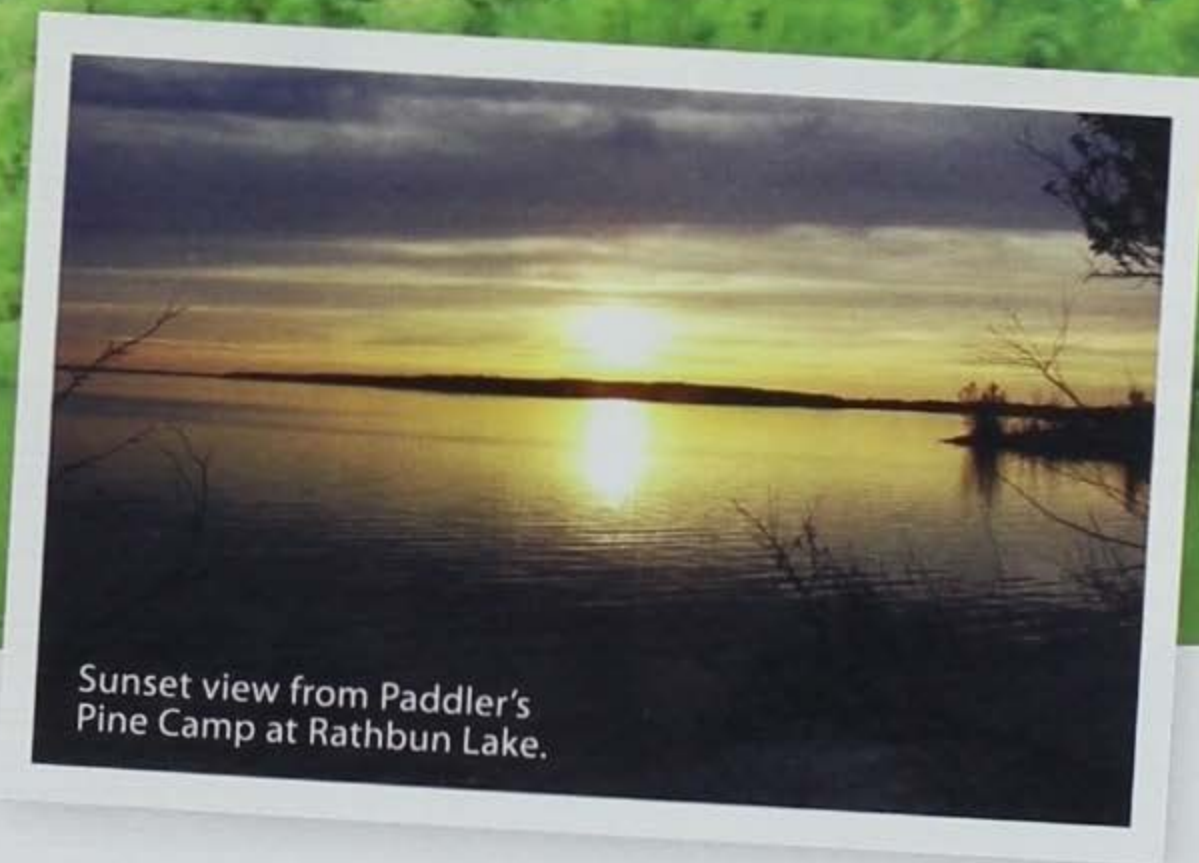
Paddles the Yellow River about 1 mile from the primitive camp.

VER: Paddle Iowa's longest coldwater trout in its rapids, heavily forested towering bluffs and boulders. Not for beginners, the rocks, heavy fallen trees dot the narrow, twisting river. Top campsite is roughly 3 miles downstream on Bridge access in eastern Allamakee County. Another campsite is another 1.5 miles. Both non-fee, first-serve primitive sites are marked with signs. They include fire rings, tent pads and benches. For more information, contact Allamakee County Development at **800-824-1424** or visitiowa.org.

PINES CAMP AT RATHBUN LAKE: "I camped and felt like I wasn't in Iowa with the large pines and nests. It feels isolated," says Robertson. "The sun sets perfectly from the campsite," he says of the primitive camp nestled in a pine forest on

ground that can be broken by hand to allow larger limbs to decompose and re-nourish the forest.

[Learn More at LNT.org](http://LNT.org)



Sunset view from Paddler's Pine Camp at Rathbun Lake.

the west side of Prairie Ridge peninsula on the lake's east edge. Leave your vehicle overnight at Buck Creek Marina or Honey Creek State Park's boat ramp.

HICKORY RIDGE AT LAKE RED ROCK: This new primitive paddle-in camp will open with a dedication ceremony July 22 and 23. Most will reach the oak-hickory forested camp by venturing past Elk Rock State Park and crossing Whitebreast Bay. The sites are on the northeast tip of the Whitebreast Recreation Area peninsula. A well-marked path leads to an ample number of campsites. No fee, reservations accepted. For details, visit www.lakeredrock.org or call the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at **641-828-7522**.

Make a HOME INSECTARY to Explore the Mystery and Diversity of Insects

Most insects are identified by their adult stage and field guides rarely identify insect eggs, larva or pupa. You and your children can explore this little known world by rearing insects. Few childhood activities are as memorable as watching a butterfly emerge from a caterpillar, and other insects are no less an experience.

To get started, first obtain a small magnifying glass if you have one. Explore one square yard of plants for an hour with fresh eyes for the small and inconspicuous. Take your time. Don't worry about being an insect expert. Rachel Carson, in her book *The Sense of Wonder*, stresses the real point of exploring nature:

...for the child, and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel... It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate.

WHERE TO COLLECT IMMATURE INSECTS:

- under bark on a log
- crawling in lichen on a rock
- feeding on fungi
- on leaves with white squiggly lines
- in an abnormal growth on a stem, leaf or twig called a gall
- in flowers, seeds, leaves or stems

Some insects in all life stages use trickery for concealment: The mottled gray and black wings of a moth mimic a tree trunk. Pure white moths will rest against pure white backgrounds. Larvae often camouflage themselves with debris. Others look like inedible objects, such as bird droppings. Some caterpillars have eye-like markings to look like the face of a much larger animal. Some larvae encase themselves in a folded leaf. A pupa may resemble a twig. It's the discovery of their hiding place that creates excitement.

Explore natural areas with a pill bottle or two in your pocket to capture immature insects for rearing. Slide the egg, larva or instar in the bottle for protection until you get home. Be sure to note the host plant you found them on, as that is the food you must provide that species.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many moths overwinter in a cocoon; others spend the winter in the egg stage.

Butterfly and moth larvae are often called caterpillars. Larvae of flies are called maggots.

The term instar refers to stages during which the larvae sheds its rigid outer skin called an exoskeleton.



M.J. Hatfield, a citizen scientist from Ames, has reared insects for years. Here are her rearing tips.

INSECT REARING SUPPLIES

Any clear wide-mouth glass or clear plastic bottle—from quart- to gallon-size—will do as a home for immature insects. Keep a fresh host plant stem with leaves in the jar so larva will have the right food upon emerging.

Do not allow water in the bottom of the container. Keep host plants hydrated using plastic stem holders used by florists, so your insect doesn't drown.

Cover the jar top with breathable fabric. Cheesecloth works for larger insects; sheer fabric works for tiny insects. Keep fabric in place with a rubber band.

Set the bottle where temperature conditions are as you found the immature insect. Dappled shade is better than placing the jar in the hot sun. Most immature insects do well in a shady porch.

Some insects pupate in the soil, so you may find larva or pupa there. If you can't get soil from where the pupa was found, milled peat used for gardening is a substitute.

Add a stick for adult insects to climb.

HOME MAINTENANCE

Every few days, being careful to not accidentally discard the eggs or larva, replace the leaves with fresh ones. Ensure the new leaves are free of other insects. While replacing leaves, search the jar for shed skins from the larva.

Be patient. Some insects emerge soon after pupation, some take several months or more. Hatfield kept one pupa 2.5 years before the adult emerged.

Don't allow excess larva excrement or mold in the container.

Tape a piece of paper to the outside of the jar with information about when and where you collected the specimen. Include when the larva emerged from the egg, when and how many larva skins were shed, when it turned into a pupa and when it emerged as an adult.



IDENTIFYING YOUR INSECT FINDS

To identify immature or mature insects, Bug Guide is an excellent source. Go to <http://bugguide.net>. Click on one of the illustrated insects at the left and dive in.



SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- Hand lens or magnifying glass
- Well-rinsed pill or aspirin bottles
- Wide-mouth clear glass or plastic jars
- Breathable fabric to cover the jar top
- Rubber bands
- Flower water tubes from bouquets or local florist
- Milled peat

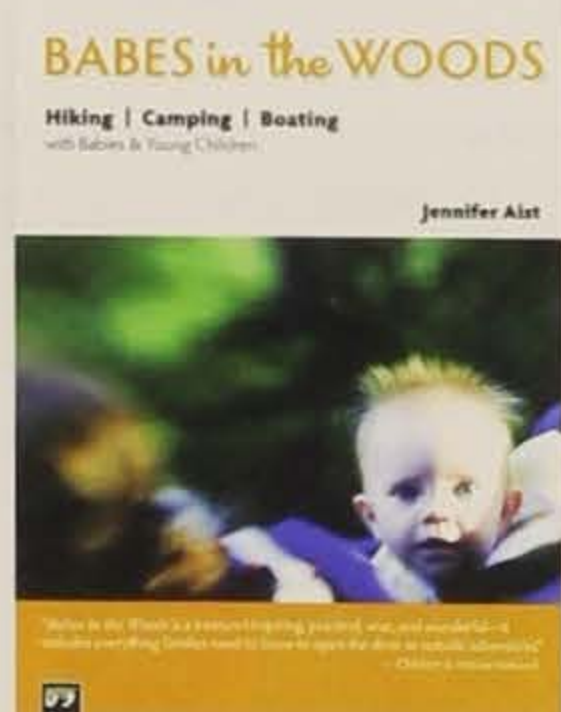
Handy Books

Babes in the Woods: Hiking, Camping and Boating with Babies and Young Children

There's a lot of information about introducing school-age kids to the outdoors, but what about babies and toddlers? Author Jennifer Aist bridges that gap and shares her tested advice for active new parents. *Babes in the Woods* introduces outdoorsy moms and dads to the joy of taking babies and toddlers into the woods at a very early age.

A must-have for parents, well-organized chapters offer functional solutions for gear, bike trailers and child carriers, clothing, food, nature games, and tips on potty breaks and sleeping outdoors—but most importantly, Aist explores why introducing young children to wilderness is healthy, rewarding and fun.

From a short day hike, car camping or backpacking, Aist covers each season and climate, while confirming that babies are well-suited for adventure.



A great baby shower gift for outdoorsy moms-to-be. 176 pages, 65 photos, Paperback \$16.95 ISBN 978-1-59485-343-2 Published by The Mountaineers Books. www.mountaineersbooks.org: 800-553-4453

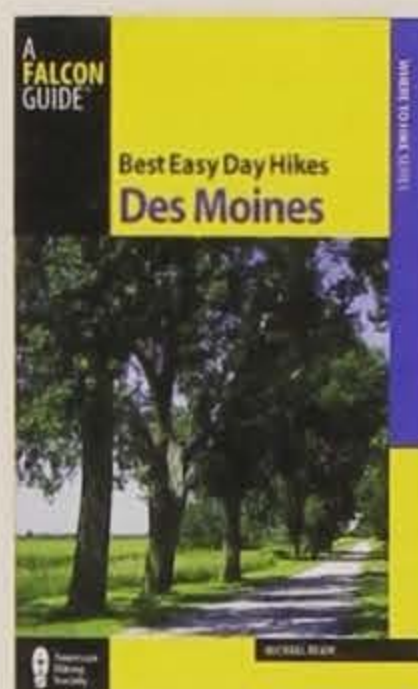
Spur of the Moment Ride Get Your Kicks in Des Moines by Renting A Bike Downtown

Popular with the lunch crowd or visitors lacking a bike but facing an instant desire to explore a vast Des Moines trail network, a new kiosk system of rental bikes makes for a fun, economical and convenient ride.

The B-cycles fit people short and tall, thanks to an easy-to-use adjustable seat post and basket to stow your things while riding. Fenders, skirt guards and chainguards keep your clothes clean. Automatic lights help keep you safe. Three speeds are perfect for downtown and trails.

Buy a 24-hour membership for \$5, 30 days (\$20-\$30) or one year (\$40-\$50.) First 60 minutes is free. Purchase at <http://desmoines.bicycle.com> or buy a daily membership at a B-station kiosk. Post ride, return the bike to one of four convenient downtown kiosks.

For details or to buy a gift card, call Des Moines Bike Collective at 515-333-5590 or visit <http://desmoines.bicycle.com>. Kiosk locations are found online.



New Book to Help Hit the Trails in Central Iowa

With an impressive trail network and 18 nature parks preserving 12,000 acres of woodlands, prairie and wetlands, the greater Des

Moines area offers a surprising and often secluded array of walks, hikes and bike rides.

Central Iowans and visitors will enjoy *Best Easy Day Hikes Near Des Moines*. Author Michael Ream selected hikes in the heart of the city, suburbia and in rural areas that require a trip down winding country roads to reach trailheads.

Containing concise descriptions and detailed maps for 19 trails suited for all, featured hikes are no longer than 11 miles, and most far shorter. Each entry lists sights and stops along the way, points of interest, trail contacts and GPS coordinates.

From well-known trails such as the Clive Greenbelt and Great Western to the more obscure Woodland Mounds, Hidden Prairie and Hanging Rock, the pocket-size booklet is easy to take along or keep in a glove compartment or bike bag.

93 pages. Paperback \$9.95 ISBN 978-0-7627-6991-9 Falcon Guides, Morris Book Publishing. www.falcon.com





BLOWN AWAY IN IOWA

BY TIM LANE

Last August I accepted a job in the great State of Washington. The State of Iowa had offered me money to retire and the Washington Department of Health offered me money to work. It was a win-win of sorts. Ever since, my views of Iowa have been from 1,798 miles away. And for the record it has never looked better. And I can't wait to return to beautiful Iowa. Residents in Washington are justly proud of their natural resources... mountains, waterways, beaches, and of course, rain. Yet their knowledge of Iowa sadly rivals their awareness of the moons of Jupiter.

Since arriving I joked with the locals that it should be called the "northwest coast." And that I can't imagine how photosynthesis occurs here with all the dreary fog. So when I was invited to address Iowa state employees via a webinar, about the great place Iowa is to exercise, I leaped at the chance. I have always been a big proponent of being active in Iowa, but I have to share that I am now officially a zealot. When I moved to Olympia last fall, I missed what all my Iowa friends stated was the best fall of all time. While here, the official weather motto is "Just wait till June."

Given that, it was refreshing to hear from Kirsten Wysen, a public health employee from Seattle that drove across the country last year on a vacation and described her entry into Iowa as one would describe coming into a promised land after wandering in the desert. Based on her description, she dropped into Iowa from I-90 and stopped at Clear Lake. She and her husband were blown away by the sailboats, cyclists and "quilt work pattern" of farms. I was glad to see that others could appreciate the beauty of my native state.

When I said they were blown away, I meant that literally. Someone, in a typical Iowa fashion, offered them a ride on a Hobie Catamaran. They followed up with a swim in a small-town pool and a countryside drive described by her as a "magnificent quilt of nature." She and her husband were blown away by the sailboats, beauty and hospitality.

But guess what... our environment can be better. In the past, many of my articles have focused on individual behavior while more and more research points out the value of building environments that invite such behavior. This includes such efforts that make the healthy choice not only easy but inviting. This includes parks, farmers markets, bike lanes, safe routes to schools, bike paths, pedestrian bridges, clean lakes and other efforts.

It is frustrating to see the cost of inactivity and poor nutrition soar (obesity alone costs us \$147 billion a year) and then see cuts to those programs that will contribute to the problem. With our trails, complete streets, and locally grown food we are in a great position to market ourselves to other states as millions of folks contemplate retirement, I suggest they consider Iowa, I know I am.

Tim Lane is a nationally recognized authority on public health and physical activity. Last summer he and his buddies rode bicycles across Iowa, river to river, in 21 straight hours.

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.

DECLAN, AGE 6, IN HENRY COUNTY ASKS:

Do butterflies need sunlight to fly?

For sure, butterflies love spreading out their wings and soaking up the sun. It's their way of preparing for takeoff.

If it's been raining, butterflies need to allow their wings to dry. Otherwise, the wings are too heavy for the butterfly to take flight. But even if it's dry, the insect may not make it off the ground if it's too cool.

Most butterflies can't fly unless the temperature reaches 60 degrees Fahrenheit (maybe 50 degrees if it's sunny). On those cool Iowa mornings, you might catch a butterfly basking in the sun in your yard, trying to warm up the muscles it uses to fly.

Butterflies are cold-blooded. That means they can't regulate their own body temperature like we can, so they depend on the temperature around them.

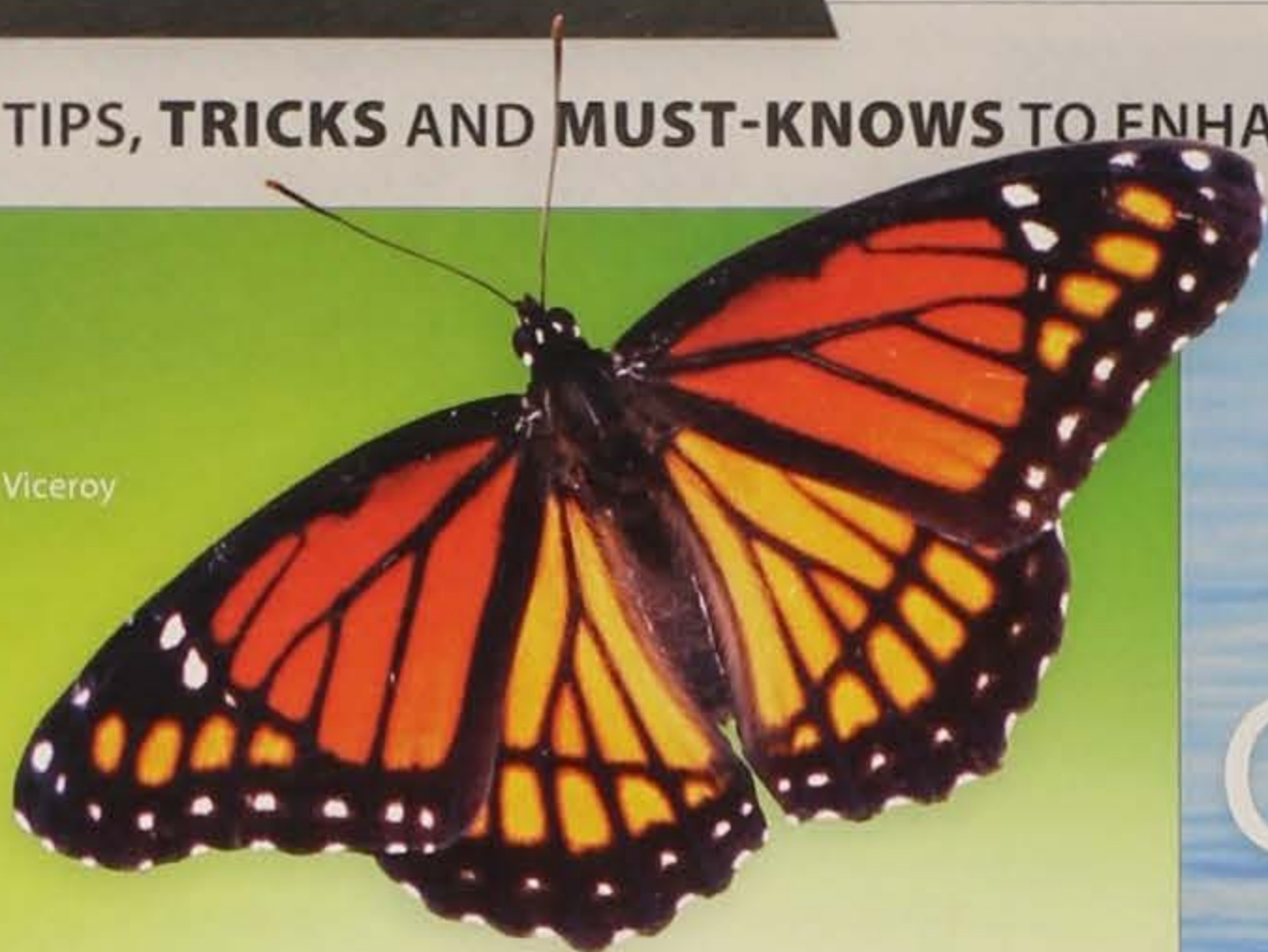
So while sunlight can help a butterfly take to the air, too much of it can also ground them. If it's too warm—more than 108 degrees—butterflies have to cool off in the shade before they can fly.

In short, butterflies don't need a bright, sunny day to fly—just one that's warm and dry.



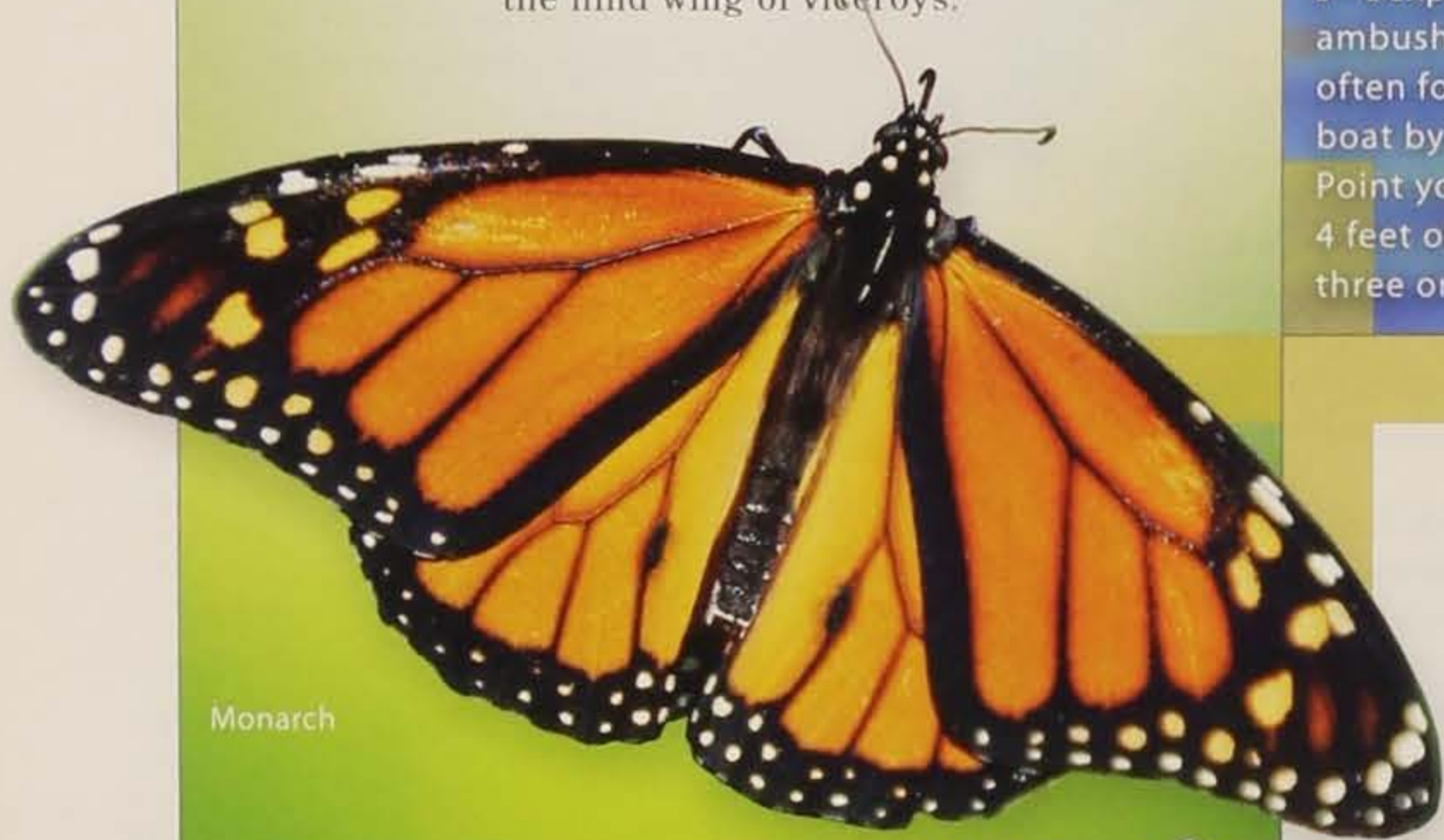
TIPS, TRICKS AND MUST-KNOWS TO ENHANCE YOUR OUTDOOR FUN

Viceroy



Viceroy or Monarch?

Similar in appearance, monarchs are poisonous to predators but viceroys are not. Viceroys evolved to look like monarchs to dupe potential predators into believing that they, too, are poisonous, a trait called mimicry. While viceroys are slightly smaller, an easy way to tell the two species apart is the black stripe across the hind wing of viceroys.



Monarch

Lost, Then Found

When camping, hiking or fishing with small children, give them a whistle. Teach them that if they get lost, to remain stationary and repeatedly sound the whistle until found.



Crazy 8s For Fish

Anyone fishing for muskies or northern pike has experienced the heart-pounding rush of a boat-side ambush. In times of light feeding, these toothy predators often follow the bait but won't strike. Put more fish in the boat by finishing your retrieve with a figure 8 maneuver. Point your rod tip at the water's surface, and with about 4 feet of line out, sweep the rod tip in a figure 8 pattern three or four times before pulling the lure to recast.



Trail Right-O-Way

Help maintain harmony on multi-use trails by learning rights-of-way. **CYCLISTS** should stop their bikes for hikers and get off their bikes when meeting equestrians to avoid spooking a horse. **HIKERS** should stop and move to the side of the trail when meeting or being overtaken by equestrians. Also speak out to help the horse recognize that they are meeting a person, especially if carrying a large backpack, which can spook a horse.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

Considering that Iowa has more than 19,000 miles of fishable interior rivers and streams, we are reeling from the myth that debris tossed into these waterways simply disappears—don't fall for this line.

While we don't intend to cast a shadow on one of Iowa's favorite pastimes, monofilament fishing line and other debris present serious risks to Iowa's wildlife. Since fishing line is difficult to spot when submerged in water, fish, birds and other aquatic animals can easily become entangled, restricting their movement and their ability to feed, eventually resulting in their death. Fishing line and other debris—including Styrofoam, plastic bags and other packaging materials—can be mistaken as food and once ingested can cause digestive problems, choking and again, death. And of course, litter is unsightly and upsetting to the vast majority of outdoor enthusiasts.

Environmentally-minded anglers can tackle this problem by simply removing and properly disposing or recycling their debris—including monofilament line. While it is true that it takes approximately 600 years for monofilament to break down, it can be recycled and manufactured into many items including Berkley's Fish Hab. Underwater habitat structures like these—made of used and recycled monofilament fishing line—attract fish and promote plant growth.

For additional information on monofilament recycling programs that exist in Iowa, contact Berkley at **1-800-BERKLEY**.

For Iowa fishing reports, tips, upcoming classes and clinics, visit the Department of Natural Resources' website at fishing.iowadnr.gov

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Center for Marine Conservation, a turtle found in New York had consumed 590 feet of heavy-duty fishing line.

Ask The Expert Rob, age 10

BY SHELENE CODNER

asks "How do birds stay cool?"



Welcome to summertime in Iowa, a time when two things soar—our feathered friends and our summer temperatures. As humans, we have many options for cooling down as our temperatures rise, but unlike our homes and offices—air conditioning is not a standard nest option. These winged wanderers don't have sweat glands so they are not capable of sweating to expel heat, but they do use other activities to keep their cool and beat the summer heat.

THESE TWEETER TECHNIQUES INCLUDE:

Bathing: Similar to humans, birds enjoy their summer splash time. They wade in shallow water (such as bird baths and puddles) and splatter water on their bodies.

Panting: Similar to dogs, birds pant to expel heat. When birds pant they breathe very quickly, forcing air through the lungs and encouraging evaporation from their air sacs, which keeps the birds cool.

Resting: To avoid extreme temperatures some birds are more active in the morning and early evening and rest during

the hottest times of day. In addition, birds often rest in shady areas during higher temperatures.

Soaring: During the highest temperatures, you can often spot birds of prey soaring high above where air temperatures are cooler.

Spreading Wings: When a breeze happens by, birds hold their wings out allowing the breeze to carry away their body heat, which in turns lowers their body temperature.

While birds have several techniques to keep their cool, readers can assist by installing bird baths, planting native trees and shrubs for additional shade and placing bird baths and feeders in shaded areas. Not only will these activities assist our feathered fauna in staying cool, but encourage them to inhabit your backyard, which provides an ideal opportunity for summer bird-watching.

For additional resources and information regarding birds and bird watching, visit the Iowa Ornithologists' Union at www.iowabirds.org.

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

CEDAR ROCK... SIMPLY SPLENDID!

A Look at Green Design Before it was Chic
at the DNR's Most Unique Preserve.



DEAR LOWELL WALTER:

We were brave men to try to set up the last word in heaven way off on the Midwestern prairie—miles from anywhere?

—Frank Lloyd Wright; Jan. 2, 1950

The cocky, let's-pat-ourselves-on-the-back missive, dispatched by arguably the most renowned architect of all time and posed in the form of a rhetorical question, might puff up most recipients with a bit of pride. But Lowell Walter didn't fall into the "most recipients" category.

In 1945, the wealthy Des Moines businessman and his wife, Agnes, asked Wright to design and build "a dwelling" on a craggy bluff overlooking a gentle bend of the scenic Wapsipinicon River near tiny Quasqueton, Lowell's hometown.

Wright agreed. Years passed.

Finally, in 1948, construction began...then slowed to a crawl.

One can only guess that the impatient Walter, with an ego equal to that of the notoriously arrogant Wright, was not amused by the obscure response to his agitated inquiry as to why the project dillydallied while the cost ballooned.

What is known, though, is that at long last, in mid-1950, on two Sundays smacking of prairie freshness, the Walters proudly threw open the doors of their spanking-new home and welcomed no fewer than 4,178 curious, giddy guests.

They called their dream home *Cedar Rock*, an apt moniker in light of the landform and trees out of which it rose. According to the jubilant Walter, "In artistic respect and setting, the place is second to none. The world's most famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, has even outdone himself."

He had indeed.

With few exceptions, every nook and cranny of Cedar Rock had been designed, built, furnished and "suggested" by the exacting, energetic 81-year-old architect—every stick of walnut furniture, every custom drape and rug, every piece of Finnish glassware, Danish flatware, book, pot and pan.

The architect must be a prophet... in the true sense of the term...if he can't see at least 10 years ahead, don't call him an architect.

—Frank Lloyd Wright

Wright had been on target in his 1950 message to Walter.

- They proved a gutsy duo.
- They succeeded in building, if not the "last word in heaven," definitely a divine home.

- And, heaven knows, it was on a remote prairie, smack dab in the middle of nowhere.

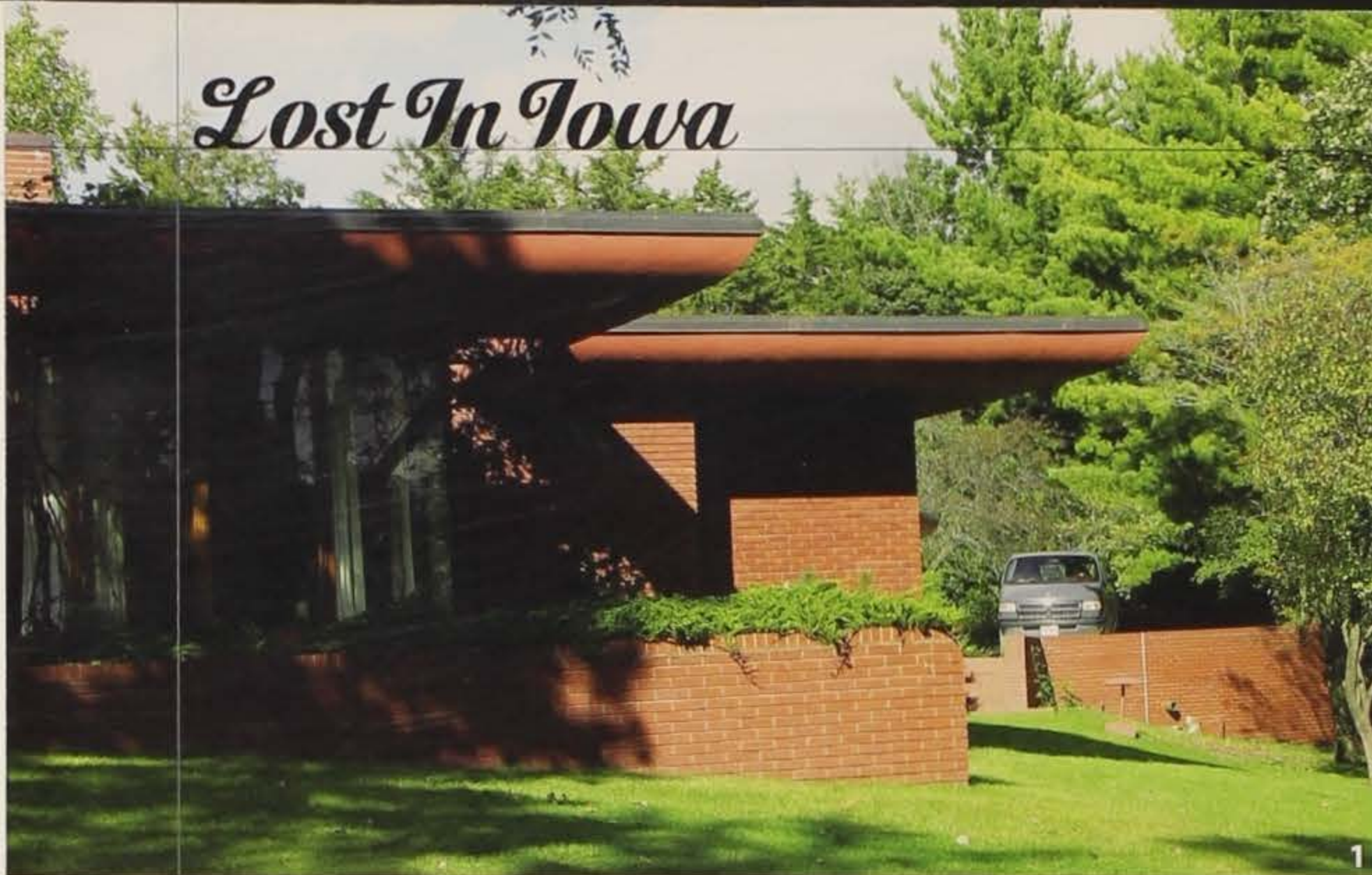
However, there was another feature of Cedar Rock recognized today as extraordinary for that era: it was green architecture, designed to respect and integrate with nature, the environment and the landscape upon which it rested. Additionally, the brilliant Wright used local, eco-friendly construction materials and employed practices with sustainability in mind.

This futuristic approach was confirmed by James Martin Sr., a contractor on the job. In a 1998 article titled "Learning The 'Wright' Way," he says, "Mr. Wright was always trying to make the structure blend with the surrounding terrain, and to make it pleasing to the eye



Cedar Rock's world-renowned designer, Frank Lloyd Wright, and client, affluent businessman Lowell Walter, were men of iron wills, which caused early clashes. But by the time the home was completed, they became close friends.

Lost In Iowa



1) With the environment in mind, Wright designed the Walter home in his unique Usonian style—low, flat, horizontal—and used green building principles, including smaller footprints and passive solar and gravity/radiant heating. 2) The unveiling of Cedar Rock in 1950 was attended by an amazed 4,100 guests. Today, visitors continue to comb the home during summer tours conducted Thursdays through Sundays. 3) The famous designer not only recommended “acceptable accessories” for the Walter home, he “suggested” their proper location, including the highlighting of costly green pottery. 4) This group photo was taken during Wright’s final home inspection. The event evolved into a celebration attended by more than 50 people. From left to right are: an unidentified couple, Frank Lloyd Wright, an unidentified child, Frank’s wife, Olgivanna, and Agnes and Lowell Walter. 5) Frank Lloyd Wright took charge of every aspect of Cedar Rock, including the landscaping that included lush, verdant vines that prospered not only on the fertile grounds, but were planted so that they meandered into the home’s interior through cutouts in the cantilevered roof. 6) Numerous models of Wright’s homes and buildings are on display in the attractive visitors center, built in 1987. 7) A fire pit, dubbed The Council Fire, is an outdoor feature designed by Wright specifically for entertainment and recreation. Scene of many a lively barbecue and gathering while the Walters resided in the home, The Council Fire remains a popular tour stop. 8) Three floor-to-ceiling glass walls, held in place by slender sections of steel that also support the roof, encase the Garden Room, showcasing the surrounding woods and picturesque Wapsipinicon River. All furniture, drapes and upholstery were created or selected by Wright, who insisted everything conform to the overall home design. 9) Two simply furnished guest rooms feature sweeping views. 10) Visitors can stroll down a short path to the boat house, also designed by Wright and shown on the next pages.



GET INVOLVED

Lowell and Agnes Walter wanted to give back to their home state. They donated Cedar Rock, and established the Lowell E. and Agnes N. Walter Charitable Trust Fund to help operate and maintain this national landmark. You can help by making a tax-deductible charitable donation. *Send donations payable to Friends of Cedar Rock, Cedar Rock State Park, 2611 Quasqueton Diagonal Blvd., Independence, IA 50644 or call 319-934-3572 for details.*



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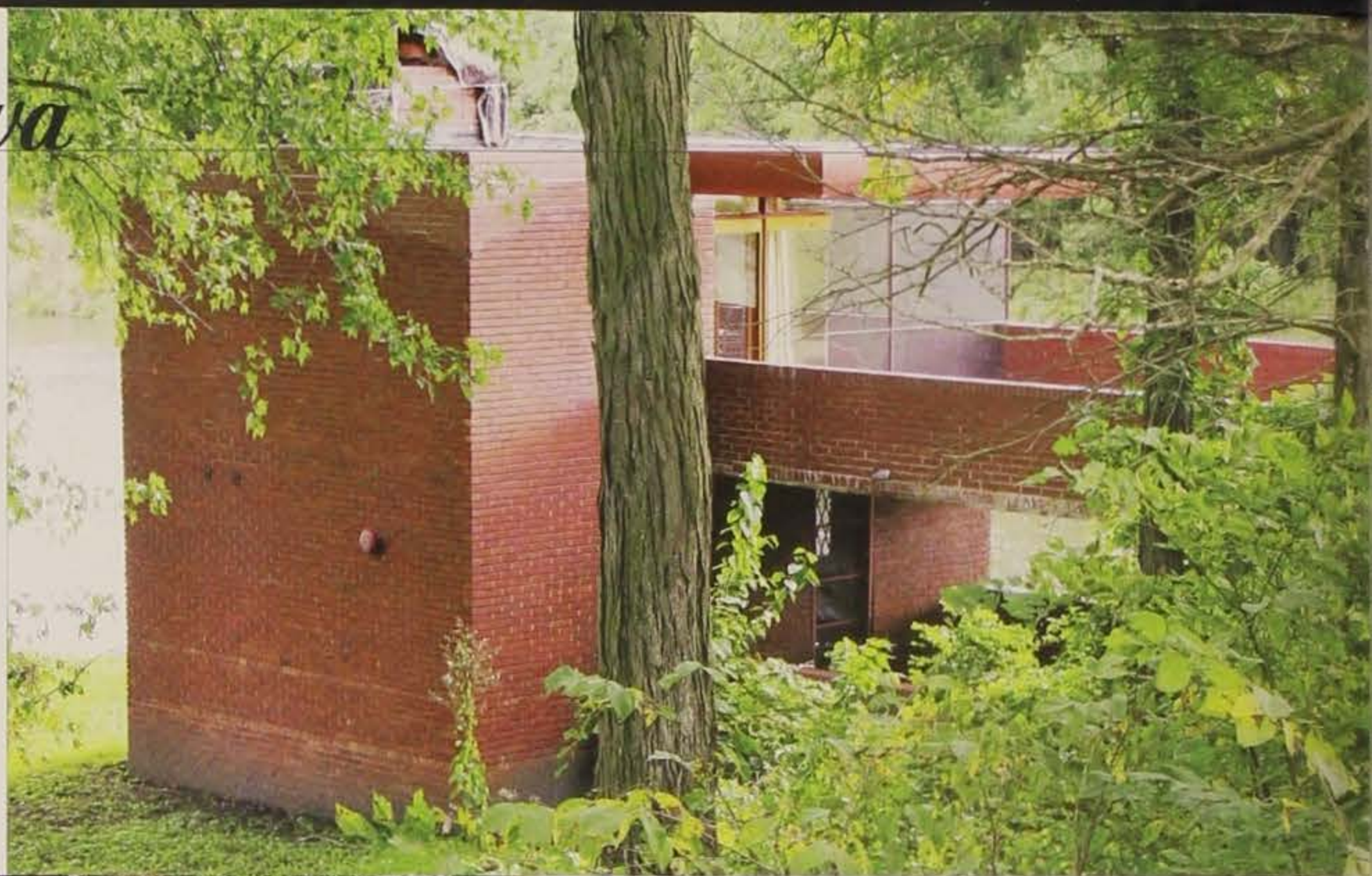
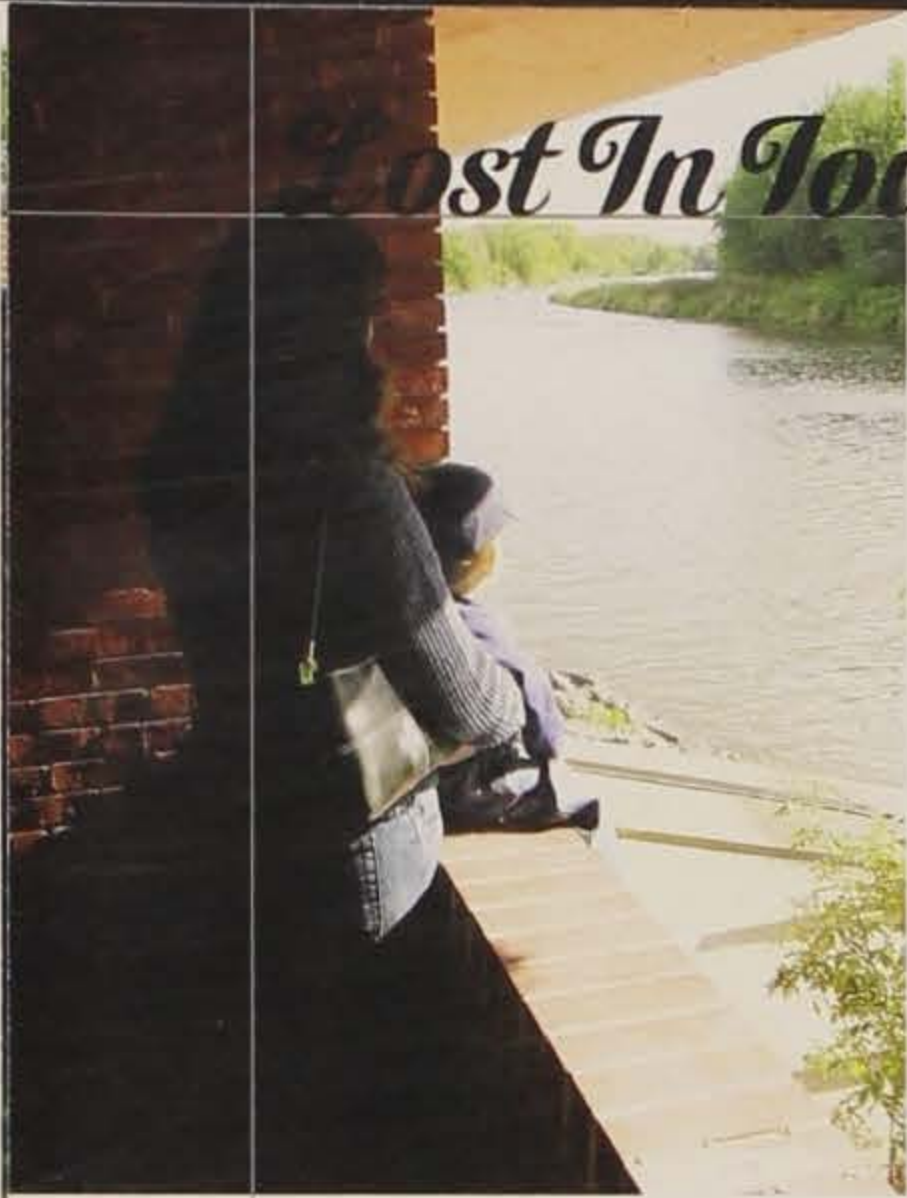


9



10

Lost In Iowa



while being functional as well. He had a drive for absolute perfection and a desire to achieve lasting results."

Iowa architect Thomas Wright (no relation to Frank Lloyd), who studied at Taliesin, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, and is president of its international alumni organization, agrees. "His buildings may very well fall into the category of green design. They are purposely sited to take advantage of the sun and their use of locally sourced natural materials contributes to healthier indoor air quality and energy efficiency."

To all of this, Pat Schmitz, site manager for Cedar Rock, now managed by the Department of Natural Resources, which along with the people of Iowa was generously bequeathed the Buchanan County landmark after Lowell Walter's death in 1981, remarks, "Of

course back then, the ogling throngs of gawkers at the open house wouldn't have had a clue what green and sustainable meant. But for the likes of Wright, application of these principles was decades away."

"He wasn't content to work with just the fashion of the times, that's for sure," says Thomas Wright. "He was pushing the envelope with each design."

Organic buildings are the strength and lightness of the spiders' spinning, buildings qualified by light, bred by native character to everyone, and married to the ground. —Frank Lloyd Wright

Even Wright would have been unfamiliar with the terms green and sustainable architecture, but he did have



The boathouse overhangs the love of Lowell Walter's life from boyhood—the Wapsipinicon River. Gazing at it today from the ledge of the boathouse, guests can imagine the youngster exploring its banks and fishing—or, in their mind's eye, watch the adult Walter plow a wake in his specially built Thompson VT motorboat. Used as an event and party room, a relaxing sunroom and as a study, the boathouse mimics the main house architecturally. ABOVE RIGHT: Wright and Walter often enjoyed long conversations, not only about buildings, but life in general. By project's end, nearly 120,000 bricks were used to create the serene angles and elegant curves of the house, boathouse and The Council Fire.

his own word for an almost-identical concept: “organic,” and he called the simplified style he developed “Usonian” (the United States’ own architecture).

Usonian homes are tadpole in shape—the living/dining area constituting the head and the bedroom wing as tail. These architectural gems are low, flat, horizontal, connected to exterior spaces and enriched with uninterrupted views. Wright intended them to be adaptable to many sites and situations—and affordable. Unfortunately, Cedar Rock became an exception to the latter due to the lack of skilled labor after World War II, the remoteness of the location and the time required to test-until-successful many of his unconventional methods, such as constructing cavity-less walls.

Thomas Wright believes that at times the organic style actually reaches beyond that of the Usonian. “The organic method mandates a design that is for this client, at this time, for this place. That is a little more specific than the principles of the Usonian home, which allows more versatility of client, time and place.”

No house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belong to it. Hill and house should live together, each the happier for the other.

—Frank Lloyd Wright

At the end of a long, curving lane, Cedar Rock lives serenely—and happily—with its bluff on the Wapsipinicon, its low-slung style making it one with the landscape. In the midst of a blissful summer day, the grounds are freckled with the pinks, purples and oranges of the season. Abundant pine and cedar trees grace the premises.

Schmitz, as cheerful and informative a guide as one

could have for a tour of such an impressive site, explains the meticulous look of the home's exterior. “Wright's intolerance for junk and clutter was legendary. He insisted no poles or lines be visible, so underground conduits handle the utilities. Another of his rules was, ‘Don't weigh life down with unnecessary things.’ That means no basement, no attic, no garage.”

The warm hue of thousands of red bricks contributes to the sleek, yet functional, appearance of the house. As demanded by the architect, all the vertical joints in the brick exterior are filled with red mortar to match the brick, while horizontal joints are cream colored. The result is a façade with a distinctive linear flow.

A small tile placed on that façade and inscribed “FLW” distinguishes Cedar Rock as one of only 19 “Wright signature homes.”

According to Schmitz, “The man was a fanatic about reducing energy consumption and using non-toxic, durable materials.” Thus, the home is crowned with a flat, 146-foot long, 7- to 10-inch thick, concrete roof with a web of 17 tons of reinforced steel rods. This colossal cap is supported by minimal T-shaped steel columns. The upswept overhang extends out more than 5 feet, allowing for significant shade and protection from the elements when the numerous French doors below are flung open.

Interior walls are natural materials—brick, walnut and glass—with no wall hangings allowed. Wright's philosophy was, “The extraordinary natural views are art in themselves.”

“If ever a place demonstrates efficient use of space, it's Cedar Rock,” reports Schmitz. “The Walters were not tall, and Wright was only 5 feet, 7 inches, so he ditched 8-foot ceilings in favor of 7-foot-3-inch ceilings.”

Lost In Iowa



Accordingly, the height of all the furniture—buffets, sideboards, chairs, tables—was dropped. Even the legs of the stunning Steinway grand piano were shortened.

Brick grills with chunks of raw, colored glass and soft backlighting soften the entryway. Built-in shelves and a wardrobe hold wraps. A telephone table, described once upon a time by a Miss Coe of the *Des Moines Register* as “jagged as lightning,” conforms to the lines of the walls.

Concave and convex edgings allow one dining room table to fit into the sideboard and another fits in and forms part of the built-in buffet, everything in accordance to the dictum that furniture should be simple and integrated into the design of the house.

The crème de la crème of the house, the Garden Room, is an open expanse deluged with space and light. “The home consists of 1,800 square feet, and 900 of them are in this living/dining area,” exclaims Schmitz.

Those 900 feet are handsomely appointed: three floor-to-ceiling, mitered glass walls provide breathtaking views of woods and the Wapsipinicon; double doors open onto ground-level terraces; custom-crafted walnut furniture gleams; shelves brag with precisely chosen pottery and books; a fireplace anticipates winter with 5-foot-long logs blazing in its belly; Wright-selected tropical plants grow directly from a section of floorless earth; and

terra cotta-colored concrete slabs of flooring cover an innovative gravity heating system consisting of hot water pipes placed in crushed rock. The entire palette reflects nature and the earth.

By day, the Garden Room bathes in the natural light and ventilation of clerestory windows and skylights. At night, recessed artificial lighting creates the effect of natural light. Bedecking the upper reaches are verdant, flourishing vines, planted outside and wending inside through cutouts in the cantilevered roof.

It is a spiritual thing to comprehend what simplicity means. —Frank Lloyd Wright

The kitchen is small but impressed reporter Coe, who wrote, “Functional and labor-saving, the kitchen’s brick walls and walnut cupboards, drawers and shelves give it an air uncommon to the region of pork chops and baked potatoes.”

In true Usonian style, the part of the “tadpole” that connects the head (Garden Room) to the tail (bedrooms and bath) is a 52-foot-long, walnut-paneled gallery lined with bookshelves, closets, and a hidden gun rack.

With economy of space in mind, Wright installed in each bathroom a Pullman-type, water-saving, three-in-one bathroom fixture that served the sink, tub and toilet.

The two guest bedrooms are compact, with built-in dressing tables and wardrobes. The master bedroom, a bit larger, has its own bath and fireplace. All have double doors opening to the lawn, and clerestory windows providing ventilation and indirect lighting.

A maid’s quarters and carport (“An automobile doesn’t need to be stalled like a horse in an enclosed garage,” declared Wright) are at the far end of the home.

Rounding out the 11-acre site are the boathouse, perched over the river at the very edge of the bluff, and The Council Fire. The former is where Lowell liked to while away his time, contemplating the ways of the Wapsi. The Council Fire is a huge fire pit used for outdoor barbecues and entertaining.

I believe in God, only I call it nature.

—Frank Lloyd Wright

To have Lowell and Agnes Walter live simply and in harmony with nature at Cedar Rock—that was Frank Lloyd Wright’s goal.

He succeeded. From all accounts, they were beyond enchanted.

In turn, they wanted Iowans to experience the magic.

They succeeded. Schmitz testifies to this. “The place casts a spell,” she states. “I can’t be away for long before needing my Cedar Rock fix. I just feel better spiritually when I’m here.” 🐾

TOURS OF CEDAR ROCK

Shown below, carts ferry guests from the Visitor Center to the home June through October; Thursday through Sunday; on the hour, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call **319-934-3572** regarding tour reservations and Visitor Center activities.

WRIGHT IN IOWA

Frank Lloyd Wright designed 11 Iowa buildings. Two of the homes are open to the public, The Walter House—Cedar Rock, and The Stockman House. The remainder are in private ownership.

Mason City	G. C. Stockman House (1908)
Mason City	City National Bank Building and Hotel (1909)
Mason City	Park Inn Hotel (1910)
Monona	Richards American System-Built Homes Meier Residence (1917)
Charles City	Alvin Miller Residence (1946)
Cedar Rapids	Douglas Grant Residence (1946)
Quasqueton	Cedar Rock – The Walter House (1948)
Oskaloosa	Carroll Alsop Residence (1948)
Oskaloosa	Jack Lamberson Residence (1948)
Marshalltown	Robert H. Sunday Residence (1955)
Johnston	Paul J. Trier Residence (1956)

WHILE IN BUCHANAN COUNTY...

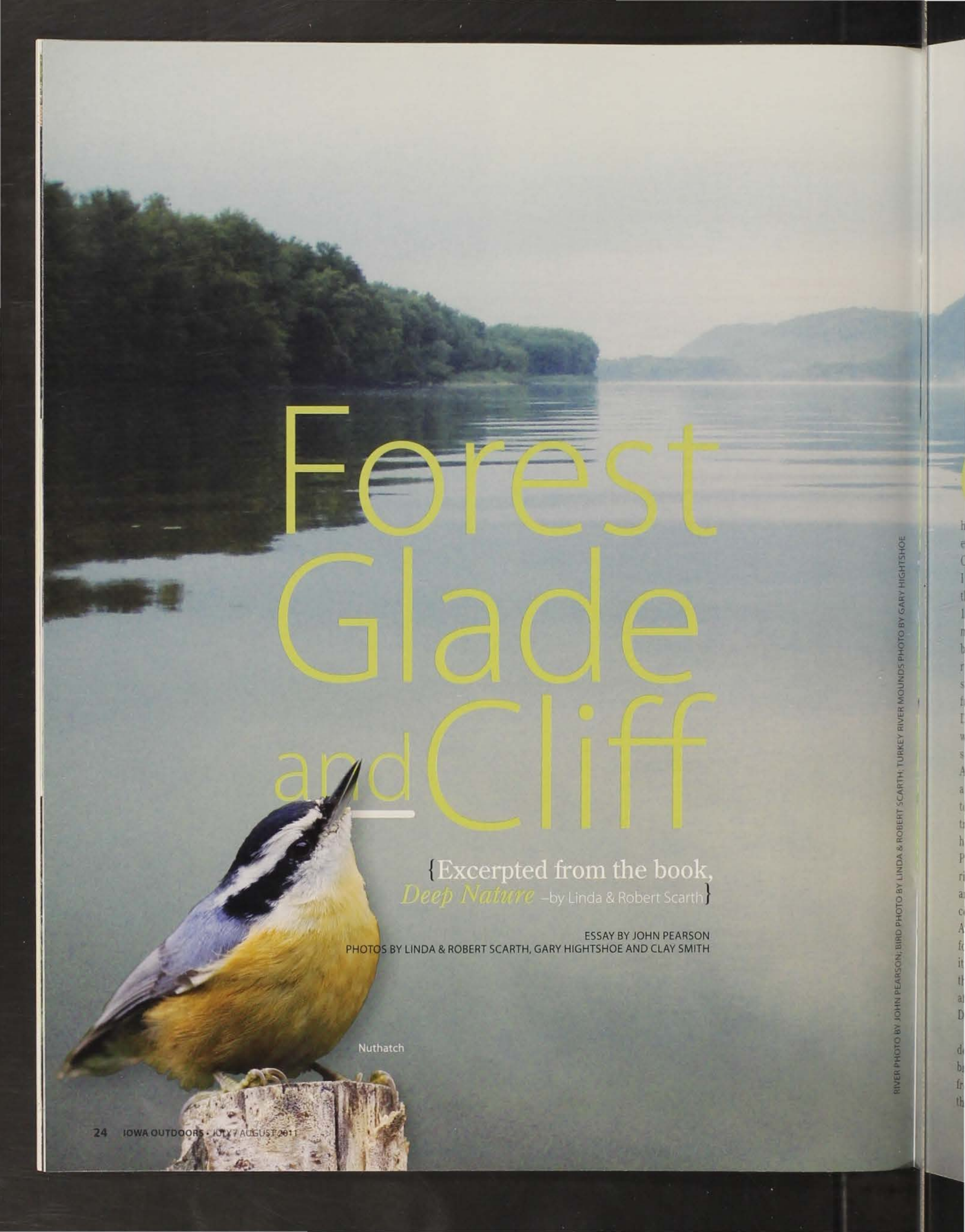
...Wander down to **Quasqueton**, just two miles from Cedar Rock to watch fish "climb" up the steps at the **Fish Ladder**, allowing them to move freely through 28 miles of habitat.

...Fish, boat, or paddle **the Wapsipinicon River**. Below Independence, it flows through timbered valleys and wooded bluffs with limestone rock outcroppings. Paddle past the Cedar Rock boathouse on a scenic one-day excursion between Independence and Quasqueton. *Get river maps and water trail information at iowadnr.gov.*

...In downtown **Independence**, tour the five-story limestone **Wapsipinicon Mill**, built in 1854. **319-334-4616** Tuesday through Sunday 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.) Then enjoy a slow smoked barbecue meal or Chicago style pizza at **Bill's Pizza and Smokehouse**. (201 1st Street West, 319-334-2455)

...Tour a slower pace of life in the **Amish countryside near Hazleton**, one of the largest such communities in the nation. Details and tour maps available from the Independence Chamber of Commerce at **319-334-7178** or tourism office at **319-334-3439**.





Forest Glade and Cliff

{ Excerpted from the book,
Deep Nature —by Linda & Robert Scarth }

ESSAY BY JOHN PEARSON
PHOTOS BY LINDA & ROBERT SCARTH, GARY HIGHTSHOE AND CLAY SMITH

Nuthatch

RIVER PHOTO BY JOHN PEARSON; BIRD PHOTO BY LINDA & ROBERT SCARTH; TURKEY RIVER MOUNDS PHOTO BY GARY HIGHTSHOE

Turkey River Mounds State Preserve
in Clayton County

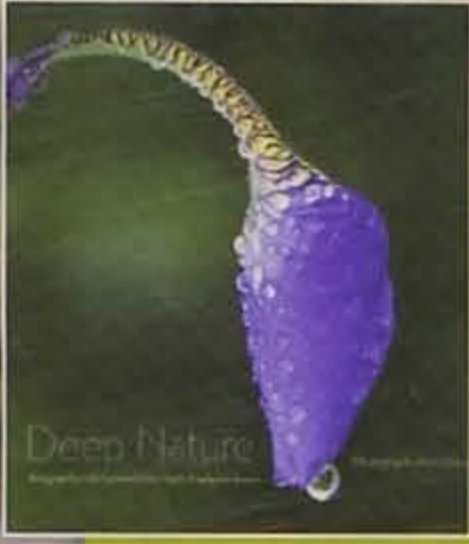


CATCHING THE CURRENT, my kayak glides away from a pool of quiet water boxed by high concrete walls into the big-sky environment of the Mississippi River. Glancing back as I drift downstream, I glimpse my car parked at the top of the boat ramp next to Lock and Dam 10. The big locks are empty at the moment, so I needn't worry about barges right now. The Guttenberg riverfront scrolls past my right shoulder, its neatly manicured lawns—freshly mown for the 2007 Memorial Day weekend—contrasting sharply with the scruffy wooded shoreline I see coming up beyond the city limits. Arriving at the far edge of town, I feel a flutter of excitement in committing to my afternoon adventure: a round-trip excursion via paddling and hiking to Turkey River Mounds State Preserve, a spectacular knife-edge ridge at the confluence of the Turkey and Mississippi rivers. Containing a complex of thousand-year-old Native American mounds and a diversity of forest, glade, and cliff communities, it is one of the few state preserves that I have yet to thoroughly explore after 20 years of work with the Department of Natural Resources.

My plan is to paddle 5 miles downstream to a backwater slough that brushes the big bluff in the preserve; from there, I intend to hike along the edge of the floodplain to a steep

slope that is the only climbable break in the mile-long rampart of dolomite cliffs. Gaining access to the narrow, rocky ridge at a low saddle, I hope to find a way to the peak of a prominent pinnacle. If I reach that, I will have traversed a complete gradient of wet to dry habitats and surveyed their natural communities. Whether or not I reach the top, I will need to descend, return to my kayak, and paddle back upstream to Guttenberg. There is a far easier way to reach the preserve and see its rugged upland forest—a Grade-B road leads nearly to the foot of the break in the bluff I will climb—but I want to see the bottomland forest as well.

Rounding the first bend, I am struck by how quickly the Mississippi sheds any outward signs of civilization. The river valley here is two miles wide, bracketed by high wooded bluffs and filled with a watery mosaic of islands and sloughs sliced by the deepwater course of the main channel. Guttenberg vanishes behind a thick green veil of bottomland forest. I become a speck in the panorama of river, bottomland forest and cirrus-streaked blue sky. I know this is partly an illusion; highways and railroads hide just beyond the edge of



Deep Nature, Photographs from Iowa, is a vibrant 100-page book filled with dazzling images that reveal an incredible eye for that magic moment when miniature subjects become beautiful. Features an insightful nature essay about the challenges and beauty of our last remaining natural lands. Order at www.iowanaturestore.com or 1-866-410-0230. Cost: \$29.95 plus shipping and handling.



the floodplain, wing dams lurk just below the waterline, and lines of buoys blaze a dredged navigation channel. But even a veneer of wildness in a state enthralled with tamedness brings nature close at hand—and this is no mere veneer. I bypass the narrow entrance to the slough bordering Goetz Island to stay on the swifter main channel for my downstream journey; I will choose its quiet backwater route when I paddle back upstream this evening. Sweeping into a second bend, I spot the lower end of the slough debouching into the river and memorize the pose of a cottonwood snag marking its mouth. The river now swings close to the bluffline leading into the preserve; I follow its steep shoreline when the channel splits around another island and enter a narrow, tree-lined slough. Without the tug of the main river current, my kayak slows to a paddle-pushed pace.

Silver maples fill the floodplain forest to my left. Amid a throng of young trees, massive trunks of old-growth individuals rise into the canopy, their upswept branches forming ideal nesting sites for red-shouldered hawks. Hungering for unobstructed sunlight, many trees lean out over the slough for a better view of the sky. Becoming overextended, several have toppled into the water, their formerly sky-questing boles now serving as basking logs for turtles that lunge from warm perches at my approach. To my right, a steep, forested bluff—the Turkey River Mounds ridge that I intend to surmount—looms over the floodplain and blots out the western sky. In 1673, emerging onto the Mississippi in a canoe, explorer Jacques Marquette exultantly called the high, rugged bluffs flanking the river in Iowa and Wisconsin “the mountains of the Mississippi.” That lyrical description seems less of an exaggeration to me now that I see them as he did: towering over a small, paddled boat in a wild, natural place. Reaching the end of the slough at a low, marshy shore, I climb out of the cockpit, step onto a sedge-draped mudflat, and drag the kayak onto a slightly elevated bank. Sitting on its deck to exchange water shoes for hiking boots, I recognize the pale, pointed leaves of cardinal flowers all around me; although not yet blooming, their startlingly red flowers will grace the slough later this summer.

I scramble up a brushy slope onto the upland at the

I am amazed at the spectacle of a long, narrow platform of bedrock filled with native prairie bordered by stunted oaks and cedars. At the far end of the ridge, a high, rugged mesa of dolomite rears abruptly above the rocky spine—the pinnacle.

base of the long ridge, emerging onto the coarse ballast of a railroad. The gleaming tracks are eerily empty now, but this is a heavily used line, so I must stay alert for the huge shipping trains that hurtle through here. I quickly cross over the tracks onto the public land beneath the bluff and hike south toward the gap in the ridge. Spotting the low saddle, I sidestep up a hill that steepens as I climb, clutching tree trunks and roots to pull myself along. I labor upward beneath the interlocking crowns of big sugar maples, basswoods and red oaks, stepping over beds of bluebells and wild ginger, brushing through patches of maidenhair fern, and clambering over rock outcrops and talus festooned with walking fern and yellow jewelweed. Pausing to catch my breath as I near the crest, I recline in the lap of a big red oak, its massive trunk adorned with grainy, green crusts of dust lichen and surrounded by a riot of spring wildflowers: bloodroot, hepatica, May apple, nodding trillium, sweet William and squirrel corn. Lifting my leaden feet, I stagger up the final yards onto the saddle of the ridge. I disregard my hard-gained summit as I lean forward and plant my hands on my knees, momentarily exhausted.

Awareness of my new surroundings builds slowly as my body recovers from fatigue. Facing downward, my first view is of the forest floor, where something is different: bedrock abounds, thinly covered with mats of eastern red cedar needles, lightly littered with coarsely toothed leaves of chinquapin oak and dotted with curly tufts of poverty oatgrass. Looking up, I find myself on a narrow crest that falls steeply away before



Shooting Star

and behind me while rising gently to my right and left. Thick, gnarled, stunted trunks of old-growth cedars grasp the rocky soil with coarse fingers of exposed, woody roots. Thickets of cedar saplings, offspring from the old-growth trees, fill the narrow ridge with a tangle of dark evergreen boughs. Alligator-barked chinquapin oaks protrude above the cedar canopy to spread their foliage in full sunlight, while short wiry swards of ebony sedge, tolerant of cedar-sapped dimness, glow greenly beneath. Peering outward from the ridge, I sense that I am high on the landscape, but I catch only glimpses of faraway hills and valleys through small shifting windows of windblown branches. Eager to reach an open view, I strike north, intent on reaching the pinnacle that I know must be close. I try pushing through the cedar thicket but quickly become entangled. Backing out, I try again, this time carefully twisting and crawling through the maze of criss-crossed branches, finally emerging into an open glade.

I am amazed at the spectacle of a long, narrow platform of bedrock filled with native prairie bordered by stunted oaks and cedars. At the far end of the ridge, a high, rugged mesa of dolomite rears abruptly above the rocky spine—the pinnacle. Stepping into the glade, I walk slowly in wonder. What first appeared to be a predominance of prairie resolves more closely into an irregular checkerboard of smaller communities sorted by subtle differences in soil depth: prairie on the deepest pockets, bizarre cryptobiotic crusts (a tiny cornucopia of algae, cyanobacteria and soil lichens) on the thinnest veneers, sparse lichens and mosses on barren rock. Familiar grasses and forbs fill the prairie patches: little bluestem and sideoats grama mixed with hoary puccoon, golden alexanders, prairie phlox and prairie blue-eyed grass. Their tall, leafy forms are plainly visible to my unaided eye, but the tiny denizens of the other communities require much closer examination.

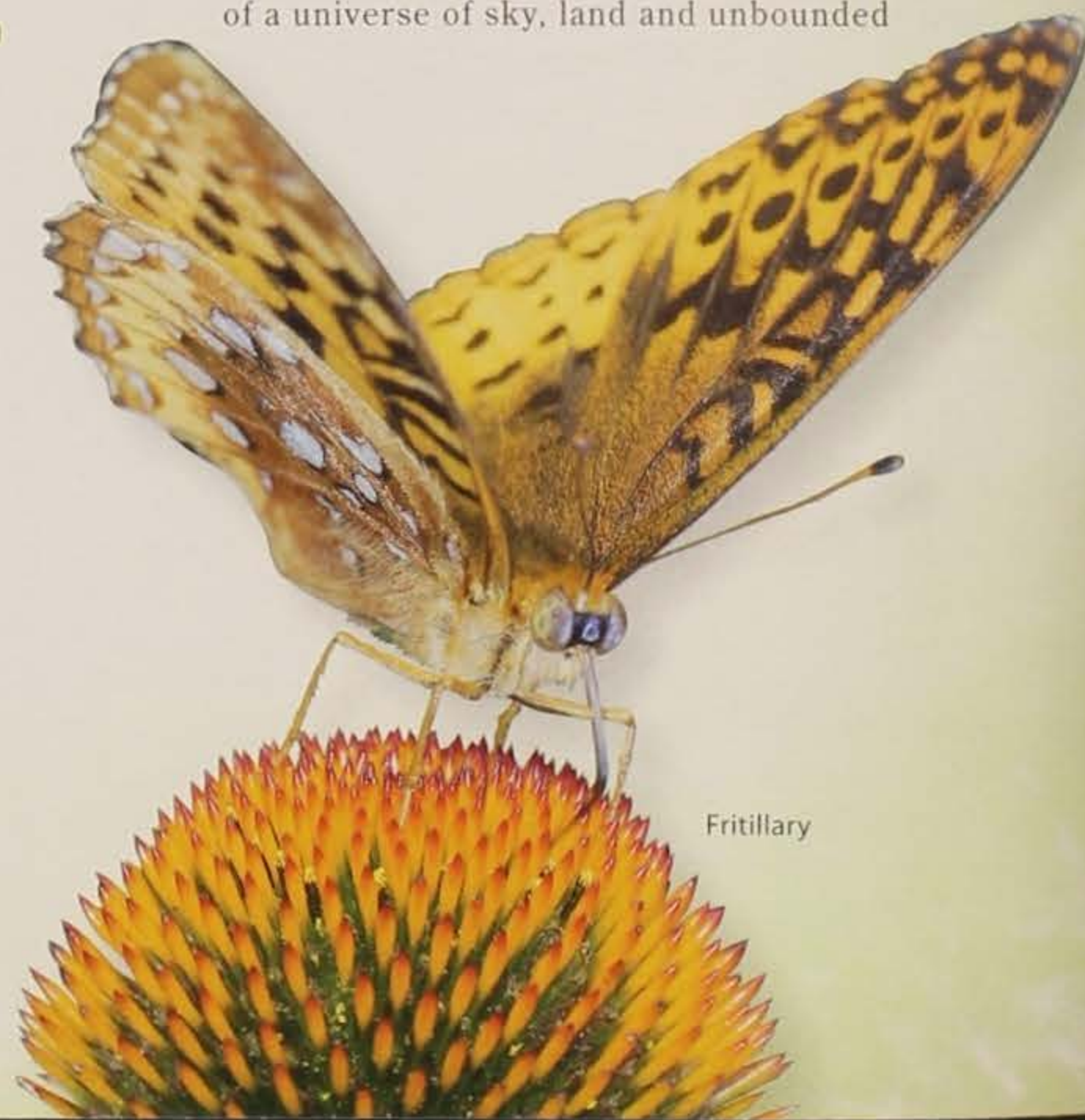
Crouching next to a dolomite ledge, I peer through my hand lens at minute life-forms coloring the pitted rock surface: yellow-and-orange warts of sulfur fire-dot lichen, finely chiseled crusts of brown cobblestone lichen, black-dotted flakes of gray leather lichen and coarse black clumps of *Orthotrichum* moss. Trapped in

Slowly standing up, I find myself at the center of a universe of sky, land and unbounded space. I look up into a giant blue dome of sky unobstructed by trees, bluffs or buildings. Below me, an enormous, multicolored tapestry of rivers, hills, forests, prairies, cliffs and glades sweeps to all horizons.

a perpetually drought-stricken habitat, this moss spends most of its time wrapped in bryological fetal position, its dark-bottomed leaves pulled protectively together as it endures intense heat and thirst. When wetted by passing rain, it explodes into photosynthetic action, instantly unfolding its artichoked leaves to reveal their green solar panels. I cannot resist the temptation: unscrewing the cap of my water bottle, I pour a dollop onto the clump. Watched through my lens, it immediately swells and twists to life like an awakened tarantula, quickly transforming from a dense black ball into a bright green bouquet of glistening leaves. But soon disappointed with the brevity of my rain, it slowly recurls and returns to dormant black limbo.

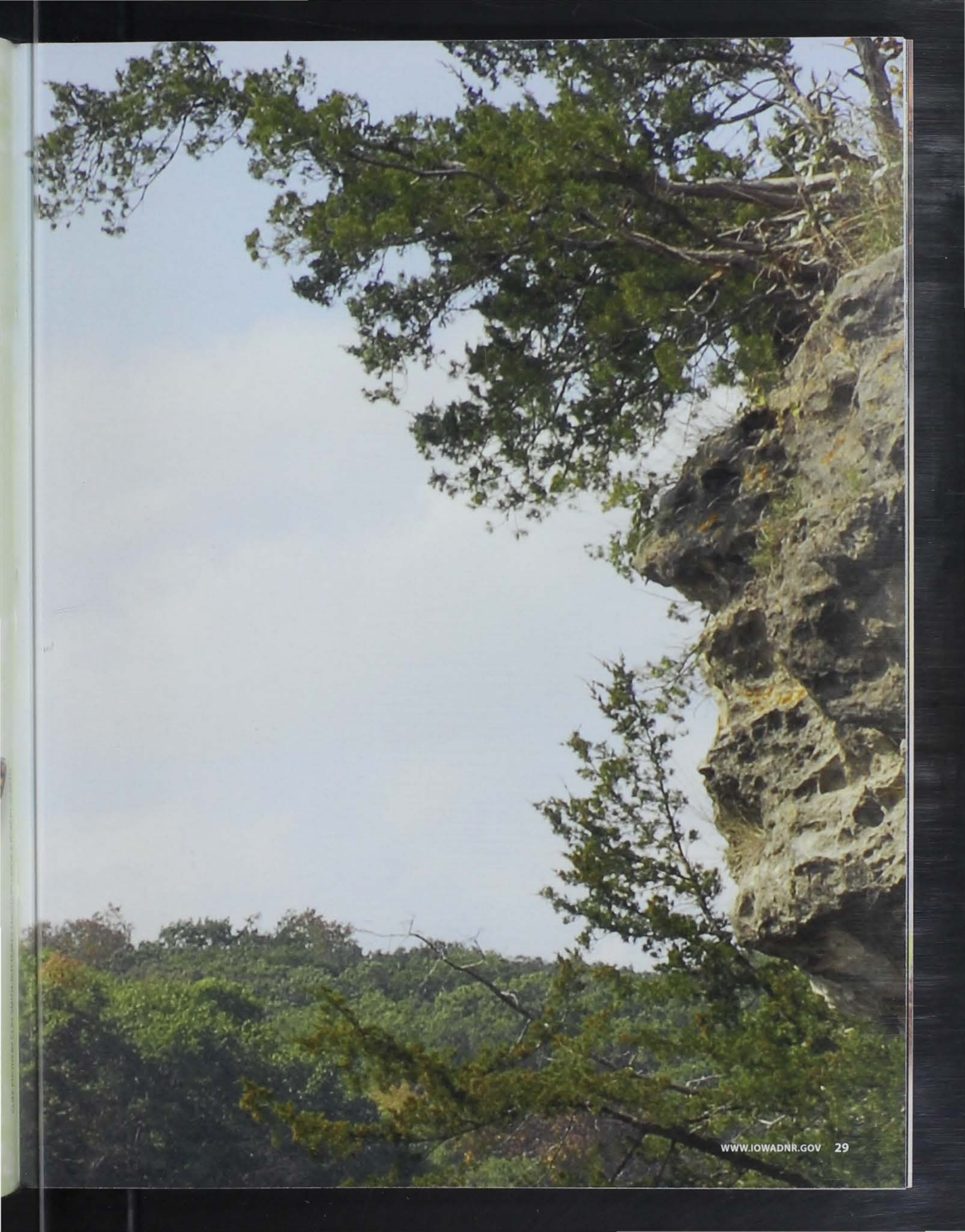
Resuming my hike, I come to the end of the ridge at the pinnacle, like Dorothy approaching Oz. Appraising its austere face, I now blench at the challenge of climbing to its summit. I am alone on this remote ridge, it is a long fall to the bottom of the bluff, just one slip away. I have nearly concluded to back away when I discover a series of ledges on the lower half of the face; following their step-like course upward with my eye, I spot a set of ladder-like fissures just below the lip of the pinnacle. I feel a pulse of optimism: that just might work. I walk to the base of the ledges and step over the first riser. I study the line once more and decide to proceed, but I impose a rule on myself: go only as far as you can safely retreat. I step onto the next ledge, and the next, and the next. Reaching the upper wall, I cautiously start to climb. Pausing to reassess after each pitch, I am satisfied that I can still descend if necessary, so search for new footholds. Just a few more feet. With a final push, I slither over the final lip and crawl giddily onto its flat summit.

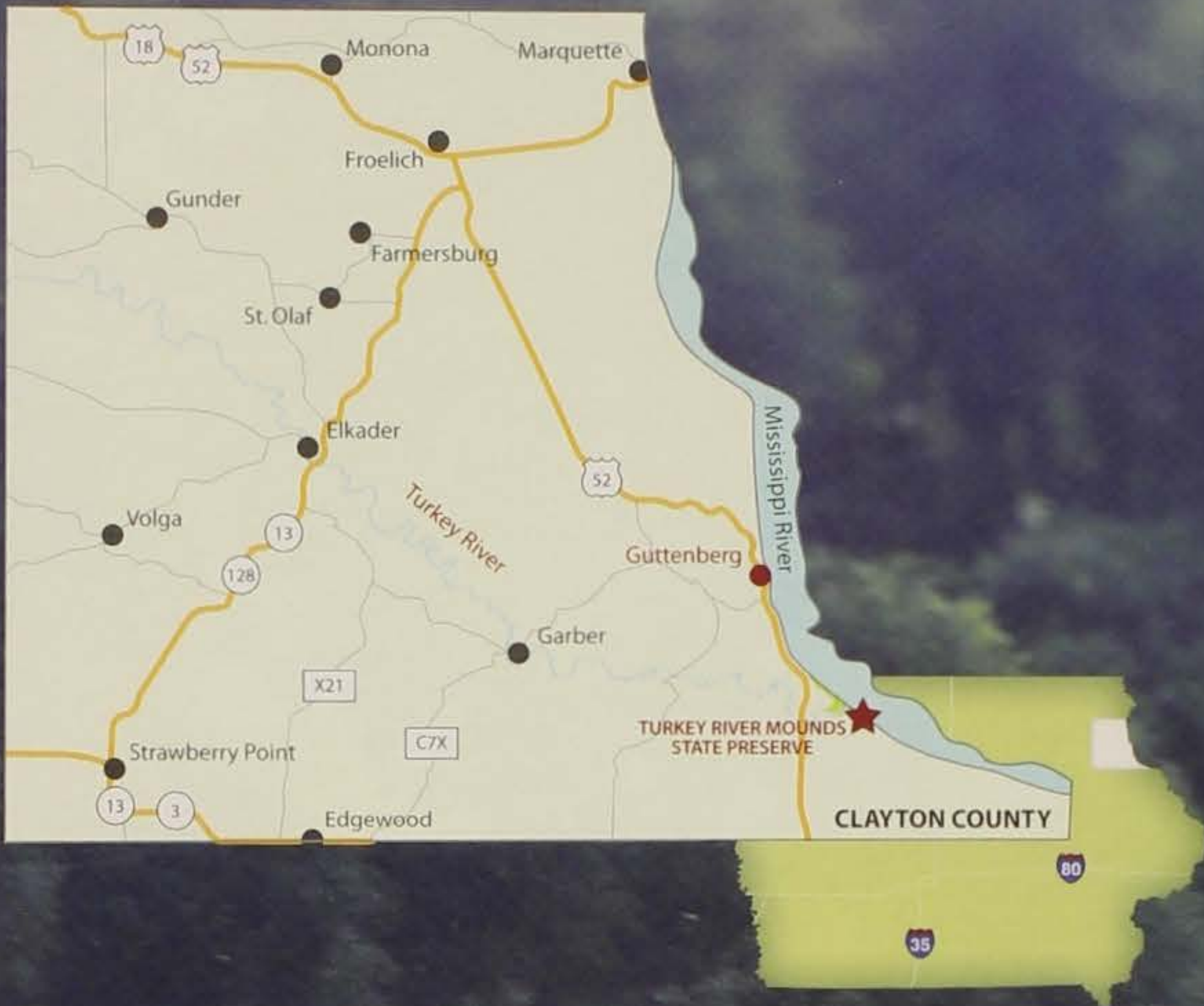
Slowly standing up, I find myself at the center of a universe of sky, land and unbounded




Fritillary

CLIFF PHOTO BY CLAY SMITH; BUTTERFLY PHOTO BY LINDA & ROBERT SCARTH





BIRD PHOTO BY LINDA & ROBERT SCARTH; KAYAKER PHOTO BY STUDIO Z



space. I look up into a giant blue dome of sky unobstructed by trees, bluffs or buildings. Below me, an enormous, multicolored tapestry of rivers, hills, forests, prairies, cliffs and glades sweeps to all horizons. Looking east, I see the wide blue ribbon of the Mississippi curving beneath bluffland forests and hill prairies in Wisconsin. Southward, the Turkey River empties into the Mississippi in an extensive complex of bottomland sloughs. Westward, broad alluvial bottoms in Iowa extend to the foot of high wooded hills; the cropfields filling this valley are one of the few

I often hear it said—I once said it myself—that **there are no natural landscapes left in Iowa...** a tragically self-fulfilling statement in which Iowa's remaining natural landscapes slowly vanish under ongoing waves of development and encroachment because they lack recognition of their very existence.

obvious signs of civilization. Finally, to the north I see the widening extension of the ridge on which I now stand rising gently to a distant upland; I know the Native American mounds are there, but now I know why.

Soon enough I will descend the pinnacle, cross the glade, clamber through cedars, descend the ridge, find my kayak and paddle up sloughs and the big river back to town, but for now I linger on the summit. I often hear it said—I once said it myself—that there are no natural landscapes left in

Iowa. A poor view to hold, for two reasons. First, it is wrong: the Mississippi vista before me belies the claim. (And there are others: the prairie-studded hills of Waterman Creek Valley, the Little Sioux River corridor between Cayler Prairie and Freda Haffner Kettlehole, and of course, the Loess Hills.) Second, it is sad: a tragically self-fulfilling statement in which Iowa's remaining natural landscapes slowly vanish under ongoing waves of development and encroachment because they lack recognition of their very existence. Responding to his mistakenly published obituary, Mark Twain once famously declared, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." So it is, I hope, for Iowa's natural landscapes. 🐾

Prairie Warbler

A New Twist on an Okoboji Day

BY SHANE HALLIGREN



The Iowa Great Lakes are arguably Iowa's hottest summer destination. Unfortunately everybody knows it, and the local beach and bar scene can get a little overwhelming. Luckily, lesser-known local gems abound in the region. On your next trip, give yourself a day to get away from the crowds and into the bountiful beauty of northwest Iowa.

8:20 Grab a homemade breakfast bagel with egg and sausage at **Okoboji Bagel Company**. (*Queen's Court at Arnolds Park, Hwy 71 and Lake St*). Enjoy your breakfast on the outdoor dining patio.

9:05 Rent a bike from **Okoboji Expedition Co.** at 1021 Hwy 71 S. \$25-40 for a three-hour rental. (712-332-9001)

9:17 Enjoy a mid-morning ride along the Iowa Great Lakes Trail. From Okoboji Expedition head south,

crossing the channel between East and West Lake Okoboji and loop through the city of Arnolds Park before the crowds get too thick. Head back north to return the bikes. For a trail map, see www.inhf.org/iowatrails

11:30 Grab a few sandwiches from **Boji Hoagie**. This small shop, just outside the gates of Arnolds Park Amusement Park, specializes in East Coast-style sub sandwiches. Throw them in the cooler before heading north on Hwy 71.



Whether it's by water or road, one could get lost in the peacefulness and solitude of an otherwise bustling Okoboji community. Roughly 25 miles of paved trails wind through the Okoboji and Spirit Lake complex, connecting to another 60 miles of signed biking routes.

1:42 Make a pit-stop at **Oakhill Marina** to pick up your pre-reserved kayak rental. \$64 daily for a single-person, \$96 for a double. www.oakhillmarina.com (712-332-2701) Continue north on 71, meet up with Hwy 9 and head east.

12:18 Take a brief stop at **Ringham Habitat Area** (3 miles north of Hwy 9 on 360th Ave near Estherville). Stop at the small bird-watching station and keep an eye out for an abundance of prairie and timber species, such as cardinals and orioles. Next, soak up some history by

hiking among verified Native American burial mounds.

12:45 Eat your sandwiches at the picnic site, enjoying views over the surprisingly hilly landscape. The dramatic knobby peaks and deep-cut basins were formed by the melting of the Altamont Glacier about 10,000 years ago. Drive 1 mile north, turn right on A17 for a half-mile.

1:08 Put in at **North Trailhead Access**. A cement ramp is available. Paddle down the West Fork of the Des



Make a weekend of it and camp at sprawling Gull Point State Park, the focal point of state parks and recreation areas in the region, or get away from the crowds at Elinor Bedell or Ft. Defiance state parks. Take a hike, drop a fishing line in or share a picnic at Mini-Wakan, Okamanpedan, Pike's Point and Trapper's Bay state parks, or at the Claire Wilson, Emerson Bay, Lighthouse, Lower Gar, Marble Beach or Templar Park state recreation areas. All are within easy driving distance of Okoboji.

Moines River while enjoying lush green river maples and willows cascading around you, framing your path along the river. Watch the landscape change to grassland and prairie as you move downstream. For river levels and conditions visit <http://waterdata.usgs.gov>

2:31 Float to **Anderson Prairie Access** and pull the kayaks up on shore. Next, explore the 200-acre hilly compound of prairie flora and fauna. In summer the area blooms with fiery red-orange blossoms of the butterfly

weed and stately purple of the prairie blazing star. Spend time with a line in the water, as the area is open for fishing. Channel catfish is a common catch in the river.

4:36 Return to the kayaks and shove-off down river. As you near **Estherville** the scenery becomes timbered once again, occasionally opening up to expansive views over rolling pasture land. Stay alert for signs of river otters, which are reemerging in the area. On the north side of town pass under the Fourth Street

Superior Drive-In Theater



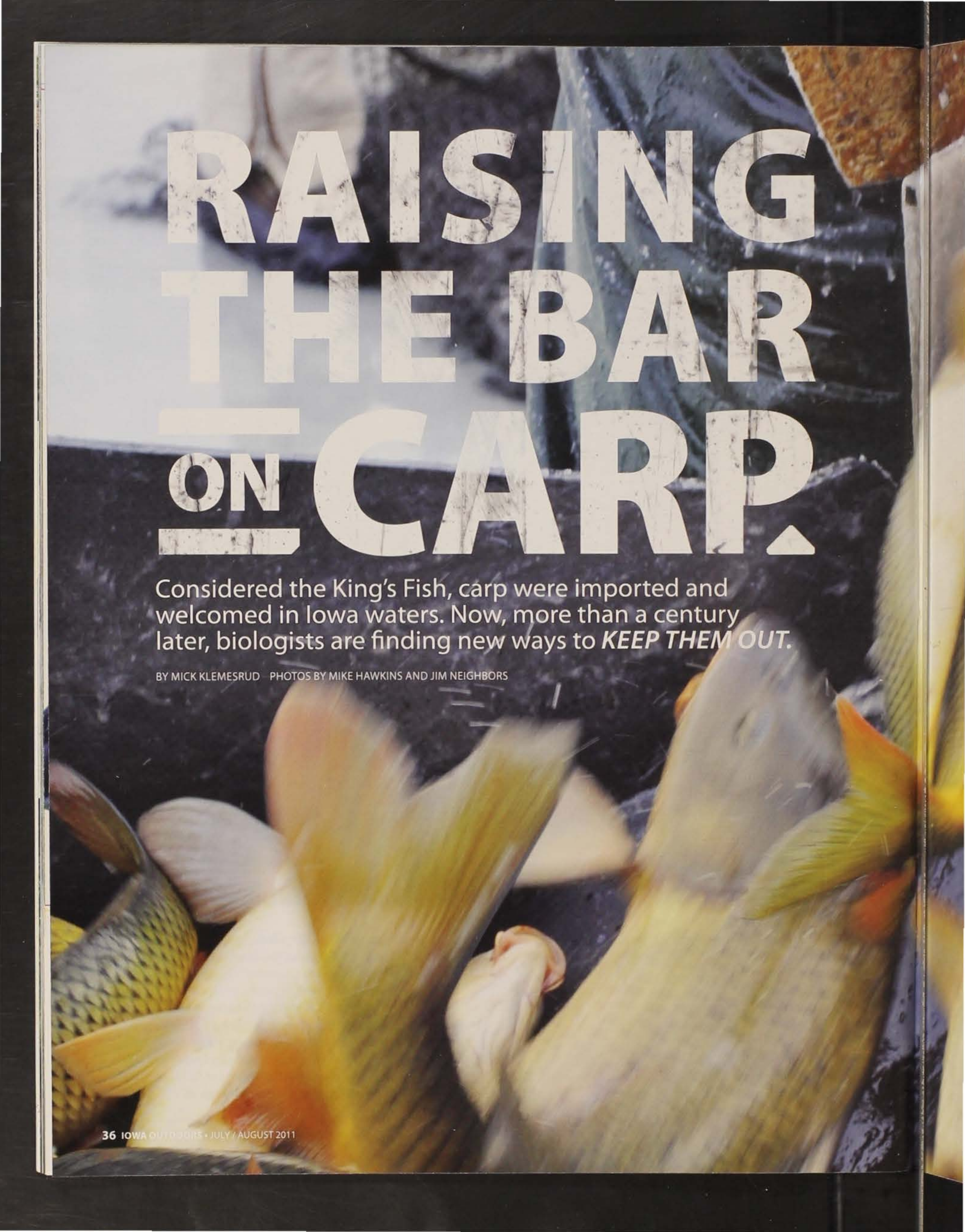
bridge and through **Joe Hoyer Park**, with a steep bank developing port side.

6:27 Take out at the hard-surface ramp at **Mike Mickelson Park** in Estherville and meet your ride. Load up the kayaks and change clothes.

6:55 Grab a drink and order "The World" at **Woody's Pizza** (corner of Central Ave and West North 1st St. in Estherville). This behemoth pie is topped with

every meat and vegetable on the menu, and some local patrons call this square-cut pizza the best in the world. (712-362-5610)


8:37 Head back towards Spirit Lake on Hwy 9. On the way, stop at the **Superior 71 Drive-In** in time to park and buy your popcorn. Wrap up your day with a double-feature, showing nightly at sundown. \$7 for adults. Listings and exact show times at www.superior71drivein.com; (712-336-0700). 🍿



RAISING THE BAR ON CARP.

Considered the King's Fish, carp were imported and welcomed in Iowa waters. Now, more than a century later, biologists are finding new ways to *KEEP THEM OUT*.

BY MICK KLEMESRUD PHOTOS BY MIKE HAWKINS AND JIM NEIGHBORS



Introducing carp into Iowa waters seemed to be a good idea more than a century ago, but biologists have since learned the aggressive aquatic vegetation feeders can bring a fishery to its knees. It's especially true in smaller waterbodies, like Lost Island Lake and its connected marshes, where the invasive species prevented the system from doing what it was designed to do—filtering entering water and providing spawning habitat for more desirable fish.



East-West Fisheries Catches More Than Fish

Over the years, in addition to fish, Greg Mohr of East West Fisheries of Spirit Lake, has caught illegally placed fish cribs, a safe from a robbery, an airplane, cars and an ice harvesting truck.

Lost Island Lake is fairly clear of obstructions, Mohr says, with only a few buffalo skulls and ribs collected in the nets over the years that he donated to the Palo Alto County Conservation Board.

Mohr records obstructions with GPS coordinates as locations to avoid on return trips.

Netting during winter is more difficult than open water seasons. In summer, a snagged net is easily freed from a boat by following a float line, a luxury not found on frozen lakes.



JIM NEIGHBORS FONDLY REMEMBERS growing up in the 1950s and fishing Lost Island Lake with his grandfather. This picturesque lake and its three interconnected marshes—including Iowa's largest natural marsh, 900-acre Barringer Slough—is what drew him and his wife to purchase a lot on the north shore in 1978.

The lake was historically home to fish, waterfowl and the endangered Blanding's turtle, and was a hub of ecological diversity. But when carp were introduced to Iowa in the 1880s, the lake and its connected marshes became perfect carp nurseries.

Currently, the three marshes—Blue Wing, Barringer and DU—do not function as healthy marshes should, which is to remove nutrients, settle out sediment and provide spawning habitat for panfish, bass and northern pike. And while Lost Island can offer good fishing for walleye and northern pike, it is a shadow of its former glory, and even on its best day, water quality is poor.

But a seemingly benign conversation took place in 2007 that would change the future of this 1,170-acre

natural lake near Ruthven.

"Shortly after I took this position, some gentlemen came in and asked me about stocking bluegills in Lost Island," says Mike Hawkins, DNR fisheries biologist at Spirit Lake. "Stocking bluegills in a lake where they are not doing well doesn't make more bluegills. For bluegills to do well, the water quality and habitat has to be improved. These little fish are the canary in the coal mine for Iowa's lakes."

That question led to more questions, then a study, public meetings and eventually a \$1.2 million lake renovation project to fix the issues. But designing a renovation plan does not mean it will happen. There is a priority list for lake projects and only so much money to go around. Lost Island Lake had a few things in its favor: the public owns about 25 percent of the watershed and about 35 percent of the lake shoreline, and there was strong local support from local residents, Clay and Palo Alto county officials and the Lost Island Protective Association.

Neighbors, who now lives full-time on Lost Island's north shore, is a member of that association. He and a dedicated



Mass removal of carp is the first step in renovating a lake overrun with the destructive fish, like Lost Island Lake where close to 900,000 pounds of rough fish have been removed. Large nets are lowered through large holes cut in the ice, then retrieved where DNR staff, commercial fishing crew workers and volunteers scoop, transfer and sort the fish by species. The catch is shipped to live fish markets in New York City, Chicago and Canada, as well to Stoller Fisheries in Spirit Lake, where it is turned into kosher fish products.

team assembled from the lake association worked to get people involved and raise money through pancake feeds, community garage sales, picnics and hog roasts.

Local involvement is the key for funding any lake improvement project. Their efforts paid dividends when Palo Alto County was awarded a series of grants to pay for much of the work.

Step one was to identify the problem and how to fix it.

The renovation plan drew on results from a 2008 study that found a huge population of carp within the lake was the major contributor to poor water quality. Carp uproot aquatic plants and stir up sediment and nutrients while feeding, clouding the water and increasing the likelihood of oxygen-robbing algae blooms. Fixing the connected marshes also had to be considered.

The plan called for reducing carp density—estimated at 400 pounds of fish per acre—by 75 percent, and limiting carp access to spawning areas. But it also had to focus on preventing carp from accessing the connected marshes, which are preferred spawning and nursery grounds.

Discussions centered on fish barriers. Did they impact other fish species? How would they be designed? It wasn't long before they became the focal point of the renovation.

New barriers would not only keep the carp out, but allow the DNR to occasionally drain the marsh to simulate drought cycles, which eliminates fish and allows vegetation to return.

In the past, the marshes could not be drawn down and rough fish could re-enter the shallow wetlands. With an effective fish barrier, the system will be healthy and will last longer, says wildlife biologist Bryan Hellyer.

“Drawdowns are not always popular. If your favorite lake or wetland is undergoing shallow lake management, it can be a frustrating process, but with the prospects of increased opportunities for hunting, fishing, or bird watching, it is worth it over the long haul,” Hellyer says.

An Electrifying New Barrier

It may seem easy to stop carp from moving. Steel bars, like those used in the old barrier between Blue Wing Marsh and the lake, would clog with vegetation, branches and other



The second step in renovating Lost Island Lake is keeping carp out, a difficult task in a system where marshes feed the lake. Standard gates work, but are ineffective as they easily clog, allowing smaller carp to freely move between marsh and lake. Today, biologists use Iowa's first fish barrier, created by a low-voltage electric current, to prevent fish movement between marshes and lake. The barrier forces a dwindling carp population in the lake to spawn there, with their eggs and fry vulnerable to predators, unlike the protected spawning conditions of marshes.

debris, making it difficult to maintain. When that happens, water can back up and even overtop the lakeshore. And smaller carp can still squeeze through the bars.

The new barrier will allow water to flow freely, but keep fish from moving into the marsh by using a safe, low-voltage electric current. The low voltage system is only effective inside the culvert and will not be detectable beyond the end of the culvert. The system uses pulsed direct current, very effective at deterring fish but with a wide safety margin. Signs and fencing will alert people to the electric barrier.

"This was not our first choice because the technology is expensive and we will have to add a building to house the electronics and generator to provide an uninterrupted power source," Hawkins says. "The benefits, however, include low cost of operation and moving water and debris without an obstruction. We don't have to worry about water backing up during a thunderstorm in the middle of the night."

This first-of-its-kind barrier in Iowa could be in

place as early as this summer, depending upon the construction season.

Once restored, the marsh's aquatic plants will remove excess nutrients from the water before it enters Lost Island Lake. The cleaner water will reduce summertime algal blooms and oxygen sags.

"Emergent and submergent aquatic vegetation equals clean water and that's important in keeping Iowa's waterbodies healthy," Hellyer says. "If you can improve water quality, the diversity of wildlife using these systems reacts almost instantly."

While electric barriers keep the carp out of the marshes, they will not keep carp from spawning. But by forcing carp to spawn in the lake, carp eggs and fry are exposed to more predators, reducing those that survive.

While the culverts were installed, commercial anglers were in their second winter of netting carp and buffalo.

Greg Mohr, owner of East-West Fisheries in Spirit



Lake, has pulled his 3,500-foot-long net under the ice at Lost Island Lake the past two winters and has caught nearly 900,000 pounds of carp and buffalo. Water quality is already improving. He uses remote control subs to carefully position the net to avoid snags. Volunteers with local sportsmen's clubs, DNR staff and East-West Fisheries stand by with dip nets to carefully remove game fish and release them back to the lake.

Carp and buffalo that meet specific criteria will head to live fish markets in New York, Chicago and Canada, and the rest go to the commercial cannery in Spirit Lake. There is a good market for carp and buffalo right now, Mohr says.

Mohr hopes to remove another 100,000 pounds of carp and up to 50,000 pounds of buffalo in April. "We really put the hurt on them this winter," he says.

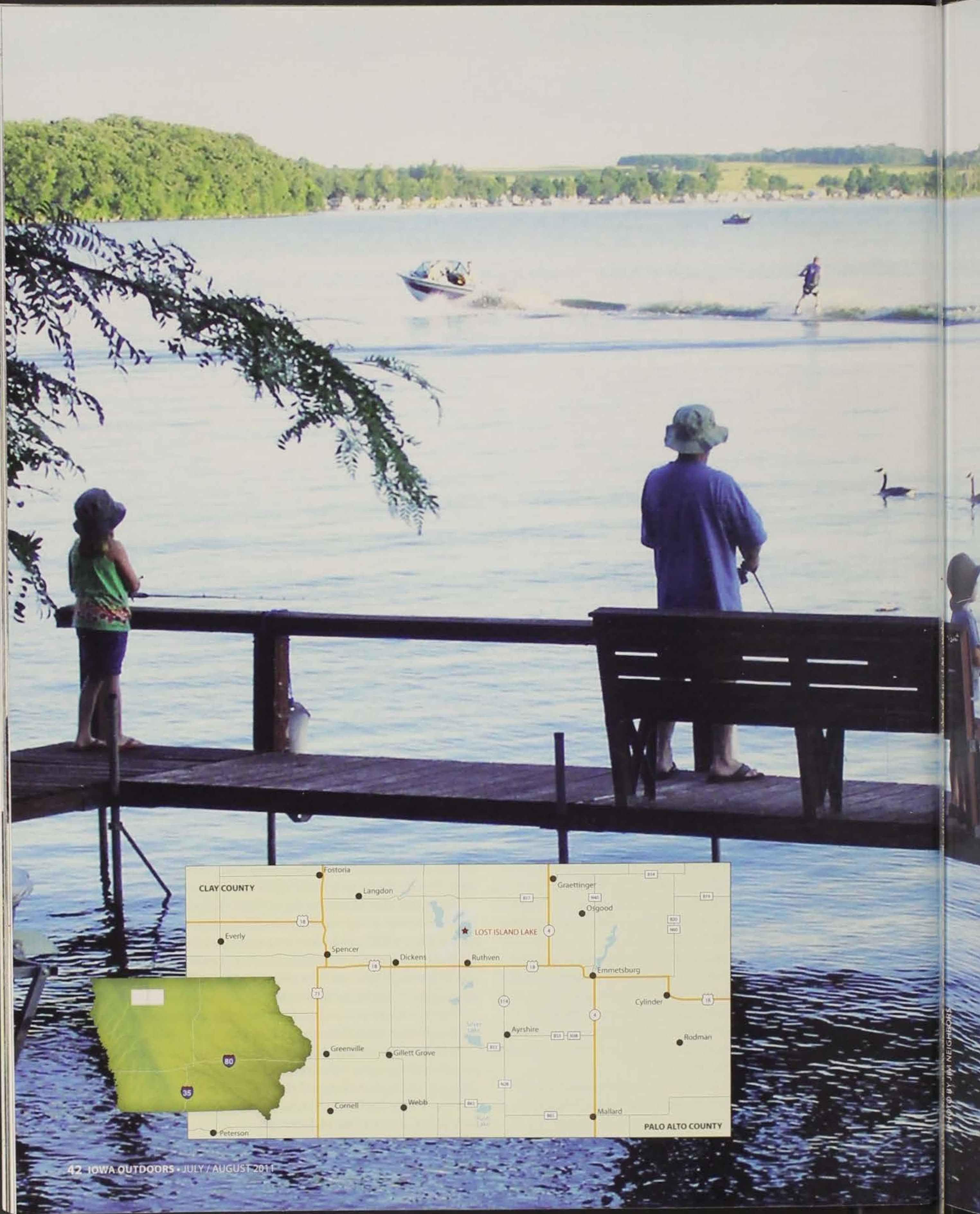
With carp numbers moving toward the project goal, Hawkins expects significant improvement in fish and aquatic plant growth during 2011.

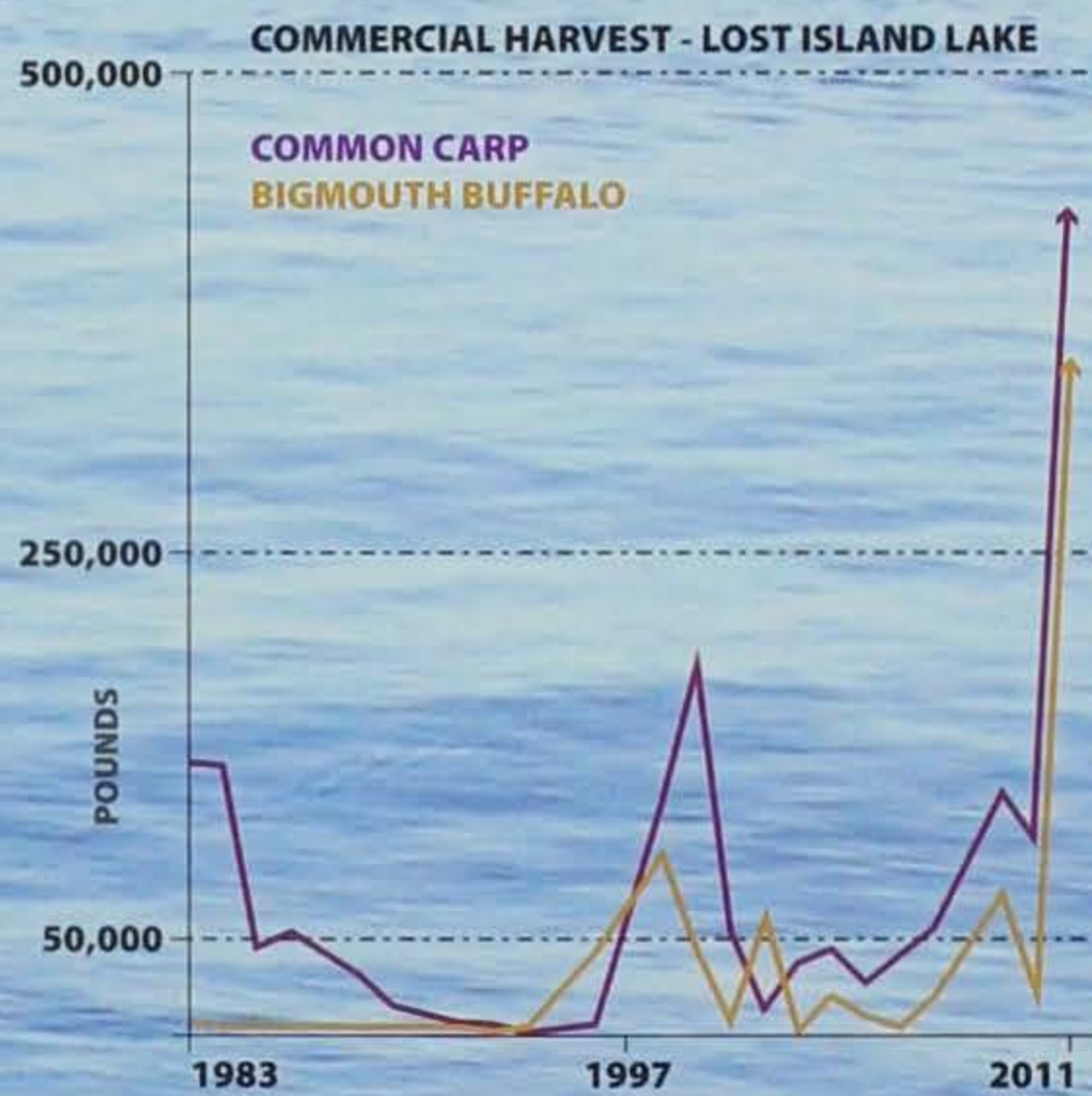
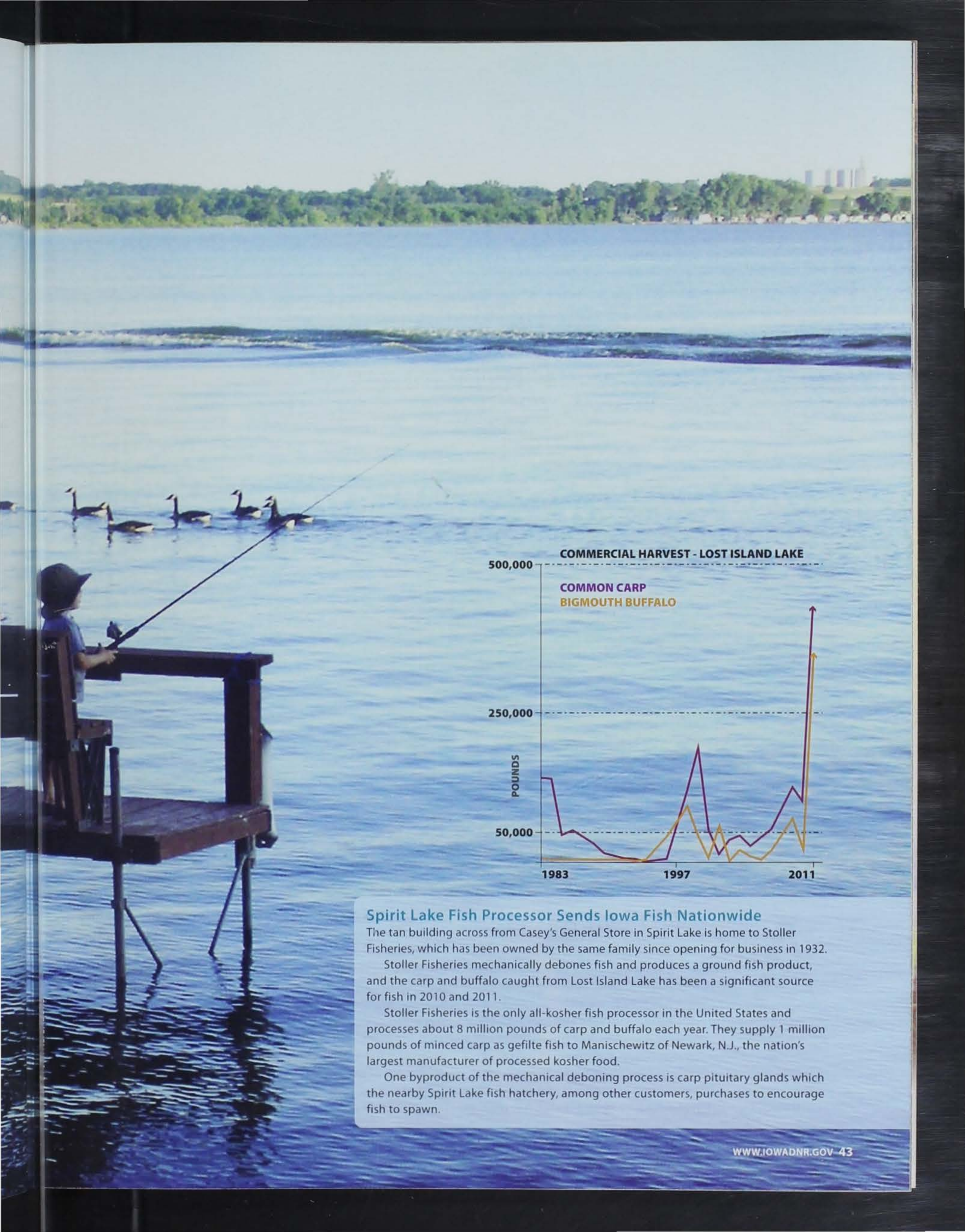
The long-term challenge is keeping carp numbers down and the marshes healthy, which will require future drawdowns. How will success be measured? Through annual population estimates, aging fish, surveys of water-borne birds and water quality indicators.

Success is also judged by the wildlife—furbearers, shorebirds, waterfowl and amphibians. Healthy marshes will attract more wildlife and serve as a resting place for multiple species of migrating water birds. The reappearance of bluegills and largemouth bass, and the re-emergence of bulrushes and other aquatic plants, are also indicators of health.

"Northern pike are an important predator species and we will continue to stock them along with walleyes," Hawkins says.

If the project comes together as expected, this rare jewel on the prairie will shine once again and be a place where grandkids will spend their summers catching fish and their falls harvesting waterfowl and dreaming of their own place on Lost Island Lake. 🐾





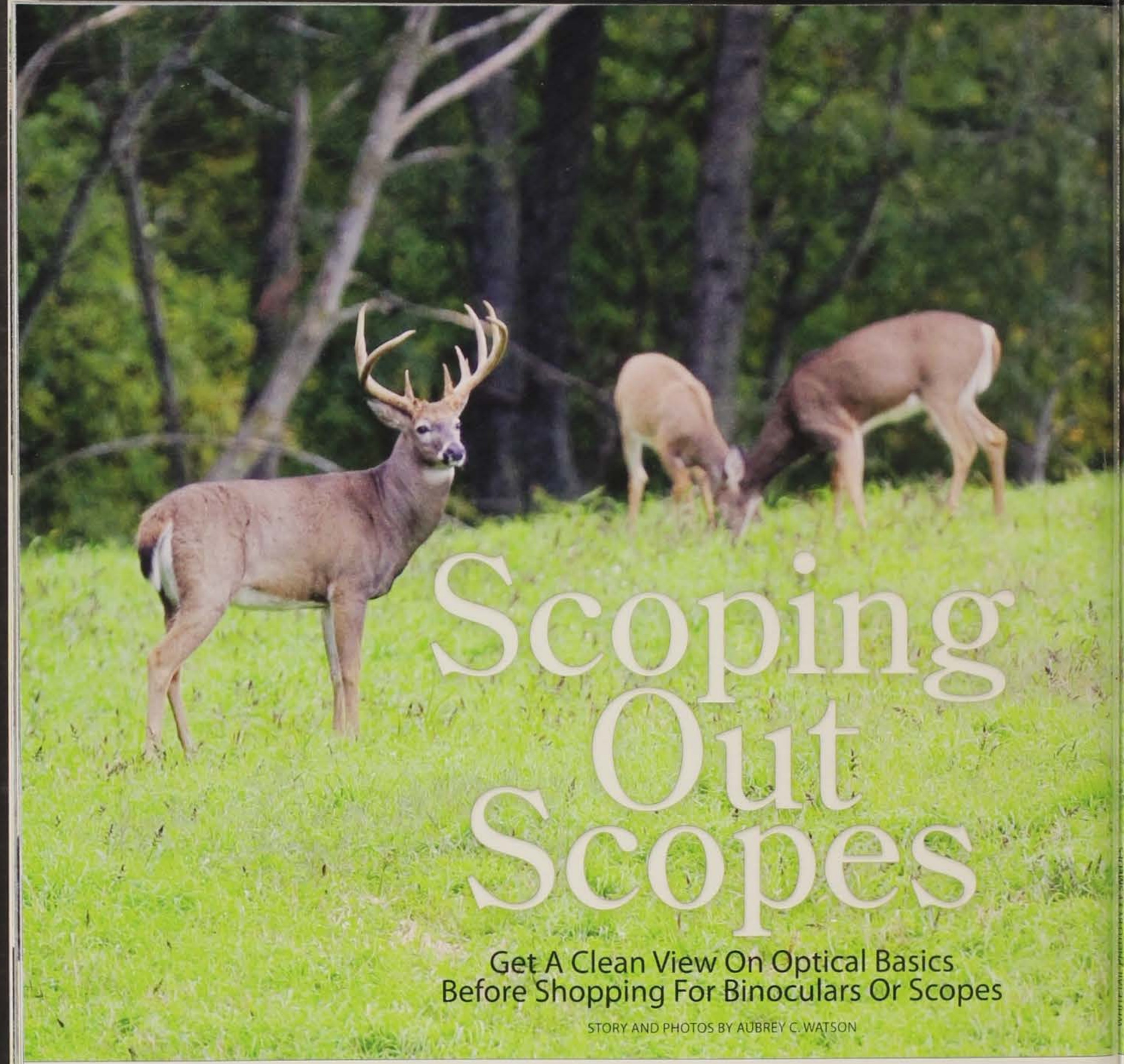
Spirit Lake Fish Processor Sends Iowa Fish Nationwide

The tan building across from Casey's General Store in Spirit Lake is home to Stoller Fisheries, which has been owned by the same family since opening for business in 1932.

Stoller Fisheries mechanically debones fish and produces a ground fish product, and the carp and buffalo caught from Lost Island Lake has been a significant source for fish in 2010 and 2011.

Stoller Fisheries is the only all-kosher fish processor in the United States and processes about 8 million pounds of carp and buffalo each year. They supply 1 million pounds of minced carp as gefilte fish to Manischewitz of Newark, N.J., the nation's largest manufacturer of processed kosher food.

One byproduct of the mechanical deboning process is carp pituitary glands which the nearby Spirit Lake fish hatchery, among other customers, purchases to encourage fish to spawn.



Scoping Out Scopes

Get A Clean View On Optical Basics
Before Shopping For Binoculars Or Scopes

STORY AND PHOTOS BY AUBREY C. WATSON

A TOY THAT BEGAN AS a curiosity introduced by a Dutch optician a little more than 400 years ago has evolved into modern telescopes, spotting scopes and binoculars, readily available in various configurations in a price range for most budgets. Spotting scopes and binoculars are essential tools for watching wildlife and for birding. Selecting a scope or binoculars, however, can be a daunting task.

The differences in spotting scopes and telescopes are the ways in which they are used and the physical

configuration of the instruments. Telescopes designed for celestial viewing are often large and too cumbersome to take afield. Most modern telescopes are reflecting scopes using a combination of mirrors and lenses. Spotting scopes, on the other hand, are compact and to some degree, weatherproof and refractive, using only lenses and prisms. This is not to say spotting scopes can't be used for celestial viewing, but they are of a lower power than celestial telescopes and lack a mechanism to track the apparent movement of the heavens.

Modern spotting scopes are descendants of small, handheld, brass telescopes used by the military and often

For outdoor lovers, whether birders, hikers, hunters or night-sky enthusiasts, a good pair of binoculars, spotting scopes or telescopes can aid your visual experience. Determining which to use, and going about making your first purchase can be a daunting task. Learn the basics of magnifying power, field of view and resolution among other features before making a purchase. With proper care, a good unit can provide a lifetime of stunning views.



referred to as spy glasses. When the officer on a sailing ship used his glass to identify the flag of a distant vessel, he probably saw the image upside down and backward. A few early telescopes corrected the upside down view by using a combination of convex and concave lenses. The combined lenses righted the view, but resulted in a degraded image. That is not the case with modern spotting scopes because of a prism mounted between the front and rear lenses. The prism rights the image so that we see the scene magnified by the lenses, righted and oriented by the prism.

There are two kinds of prisms used in spotting scopes

as well as in binoculars: **ROOF PRISMS** and **PORRO PRISMS**. Roof prisms are shaped like a roof and fit in pairs inside the scope providing a slim streamlined shape. Porro prisms, named for Ignazio Porro, the Italian engineer who patented his image-erecting system in 1854, provide high depth perception and generally give a wider field of view. Scopes using Porro prisms are easily identified by their shape. The objective, or front lens is offset from the eyepiece. The same is true of binoculars. Porro prism binoculars generally produce a brighter image than a roof prism instrument of the same power and the same size objective lens. However, as of 2005, the optical quality of the best roof prism binoculars

Most spotting scopes have a peep sight on the top such as the one shown here. This is an aiming device used to help find distant subjects.

TWO KINDS OF BINOCULARS ARE: Porro prism on the left and roof prism to the right. Roof prisms allow for a slim compact design. The Porro prism binocular here is a wide angle design with a field of view of 525 feet at 1000 yards and a magnification factor of seven. The compact binocular has a magnification factor of 8 and a field of view of 368 feet at 1000 yards.



A 30-60 x 77 spotting scope fitted with a high resolution telephoto adapter and a digital SLR camera (FAR RIGHT). This is the equivalent of an 800 millimeter, f/11 lens when used with this digital camera. The telephoto adapter replaces the 30-60 zoom eyepiece.

A full moon photographed using the 800 millimeter scope adapter is shown here as it appeared in the camera. The high resolution of the lens will allow the moon to be cropped to full frame and still show fine detail.

is comparable to Porro prism binoculars due to improved coating processes. Several European manufacturers have discontinued Porro prism binoculars.

A second type of scope is a **CATADIOPTRIC** design that uses a series of mirrors and lenses. The mirror design allows for a very powerful telescope to be lightweight and comparably inexpensive. A few small Catadioptric scopes are in use as spotting scopes, however most are used by astronomers.

Understanding Magnifying Power

The magnifying power of scopes and binoculars is expressed by two numbers separated by an X. The first number or pair of numbers indicates the magnification power; the number following the X is the diameter of the objective or front lens. For example, a 10-30 X 50

indicates a scope with a variable magnifying power from 10 to 30 times a normal view and a front lens of 50 millimeters in diameter. A larger objective lens allows more light to enter the spotting scope resulting in a brighter image. A 10 X 30 scope would not be as bright as a 10 X 50 scope although the magnification is the same. The same formula applies to binoculars which are little more than two small spotting scopes with a hinged mount and a focusing mechanism.

Choose Field of View for Your Usage

Another factor in choosing a spotting scope is the instrument's field of view, or the width of the viewing area from a distance of 1,000 yards. The field of view of binoculars is fixed unless the instrument has variable magnification, often called zoom binoculars, in which case the field of view diminishes as the magnification is increased. Most spotting scopes have variable power and most binoculars are of a fixed power. In the case of fixed magnification the field of view is expressed in feet or meters, at 1,000 yards or 1,000 meters; for example, a pair of wide-angle binoculars with a magnification power of seven may have a field of view of 525 feet at 1,000 yards, while binoculars of the same power with a normal view can have a field of view of 376 feet. The numbers are engraved on the face of binoculars, usually near the eyepiece. As the power of a scope or binocular increases the field of view decreases, much like the zoom lens of a camera.





A wide field of view is better suited for following fast moving action or for scanning for wildlife.

Other factors that determine the quality and the price of scopes and binoculars are: coated lenses, fog-proofing, eye relief and resolution.

The Benefits of Coated Lenses

Lens surface coatings reduce light loss and glare caused by reflections, resulting in higher contrast images as well as reduced eye strain. Similar coatings are applied to camera lenses. Four types of coatings are available depending on the quality and cost of the instrument. If the lens is coated, only a single layer of coating is applied to one lens surface. Fully coated means a single layer of coating is applied to all air-to-glass surfaces. Multi-coated indicates multiple layers of coating on at least one glass surface and fully multi coated means all air to glass surfaces have multiple coatings. Common materials used for coating optics in spotting scopes and binoculars are magnesium fluoride and calcium fluoride. Other coatings are closely guarded formulas.

Fog Proofed Options

Another feature to look for is fog proofing, or nitrogen purged, meaning the air inside is replaced by nitrogen to prevent condensation from forming inside the scope when it is moved from cold surroundings to warm. A

good scope will be well sealed and will remain purged for a lifetime with proper care.

Eye Relief For Eyeglass Wearers

Eye relief is the distance the scope can be held from eye and still provide a full field-of-view. Extended eye relief is ideal for people who wear eye glasses.

Advice on Resolution

Resolution is the ability of a scope or binoculars to distinguish detail and clarity of the view. Determining the resolution of scopes and binoculars can be difficult but not impossible. There are too many factors such as lighting conditions, brightness of your surrounding and brightness on the subject in view to simply judge resolution by looking through the scope. One way to begin to determine resolution is by looking at the price tag. Generally the more an instrument cost the better the instrument. That, however, is not always true. The line between good, better and best is blurred today by worldwide assembly plants, available materials and computer aided design. Look for a scope that is labeled High Resolution with Low Dispersion Glass. Low dispersion glass is the type used to make camera lenses. High resolution spotting scopes with low dispersion glass can be used as telephoto camera lenses with the proper adapters. Spotting scopes and telescopes with camera adapters won't replace telephoto camera lenses; nonetheless they can render good results under ideal conditions. 🐾



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Kaster's Kove

An Essay On Father, Son and Fishing

BY DAVID C. WEISS PHOTOS FROM DNR ARCHIVES

MY FATHER'S JOB required that he be away five days each week. His return home on Friday was much heralded by me, my mother, and my nine brothers and sisters.

And though his weekends were filled with yard work and other chores made necessary by a large family, he always found a way to make each of us feel special.

For me, that special attention manifested itself on those rare occasions he allowed himself a few hours for fishing. It was always a Saturday (as Sundays were reserved for church and visiting grandparents) and it always began early, usually with a hearty breakfast.

I can still smell the pancakes and feel the warm breeze filtering in the bedroom window. Since dad didn't usually wake me, when I heard his voice—"You'd better get up if you wanna' catch an alimgator this morning!"—I knew where we were going.

(*Alimgator* was one of Dad's many made-up words to entertain us, a big part of his playful nature.) I hurried through breakfast and helped to gather the gear.

Dad had several bait-cast reels—mostly Pflueger and Shakespeare—that were already quite old; and though my fishing expertise was limited, I was keenly aware that these were prized pieces. They were loaded into the car with great care and reverence.

I could barely sit still or stay quiet as we drove to the lake, located barely a half-hour from our house. I dreamed of the sunfish, perch and bluegill I would catch—maybe a crappie or walleye would find my hook.

"I sure hope they're biting," I said.

"I hope so, too," Dad replied, "especially the bullheads."

The lake's most notorious species, and therefore the primary target of my father, was the bullhead.

I did not care for them. They were ugly and they were mean, especially to little boys whose hands too often found the sharp barb along their slimy backs.

But they were plentiful! Whether we fished from shore or from a boat, it was common to return home with a 5-gallon bucket filled with the slippery critters. (Mom still shudders at the thought of standing over a frying pan splashing hot grease and bullheads!)

Before hitting the water, we usually stopped at Kaster's Kove, a bait shop that also rented boats. On this morning, Dad chose to do just that. Lucky for me, cost





Capture a young one's first fishing trip, or ratchet up your own efforts with the new DNR's new **FIRST FISH AND MASTER ANGLER AWARDS PROGRAM**. Memorialize that first catch or monster walleye with a photo-inlaid certificate, and if you are really good, earn a silver or gold medallion. Visit iowadnr.gov/fish/masterangler.html for details.



for a boat and motor always included a candy bar or two; occasionally even a soda.

In no time, our gear was loaded in the coolest boat I had ever seen—a 14-foot Crestliner with faded gray paint.

Dad had the outboard running—a slightly banged-up white Johnson that was noisier than our lawn mower—and we were soon inching away from the dock.

It didn't matter that the motor jerked roughly the first five minutes, or that the boat had a slight leak just behind my father. In those moments, gliding across the water with my dad, I knew I was the luckiest kid on Earth. (And I knew that one day I would have my own boat and I would take my dad fishing.)

The sights and smells filled my head as we motored along. A weed bed appeared to our left and a pair of leggy, squawking birds repeatedly dive-bombed the water's surface.

A dead carp floated by and the smell of decay passed with it. We approached a popular beach, and though it was deserted at this early morning hour, I caught a whiff of suntan lotion, heavy on the coconut.

Another weed bed appeared, and Dad eased back on the throttle. When he shut down the motor a few moments later (it belched loudly before emitting a puff of smoke,) I knew we had found our spot. (Dad always knew right where to find fish. I don't ever recall moving from one spot to another. He was a human fish finder.) Once the anchors were in place, we were set.

We fished exclusively with worms and nightcrawlers, former residents of our vegetable garden or purchased from the bait shop moments earlier. Their Styrofoam home shared the small paper bag with our Snickers bars.

Dad glommed a crawler onto his hook and with a huge sinker affixed to the heavy, black line was able to toss it a fair distance. It landed with a loud "plop" just a few feet from the protruding weeds, and dropped straight to the bottom. I watched in a near trance as one perfect circle after another moved outward from the spot where his sinker had entered the water.

Now it was my turn. Dad always made a huge production of finding the largest crawler to place on my hook.

"You're gonna' fool around and catch an alimgator with this one," he'd say with a sly grin as he hooked the squirming crawler three or four times, an art form that

I could never master.

For my part, I gazed longingly at the extra bait-caster resting beside me in the boat. Of course, I wanted to use a bait-caster (just like my dad,) but my demonstrated expertise producing backlashes while casting on previous trips had prompted Dad to purchase a "closed-face" Zebco, which even I could not mess up.

My brief longing was quickly set aside as I brought the Zebco over to my right shoulder, lifted my thumb from the button, and in the same moment flung the worm, hook, sinker and bobber in a wide arc above the glistening water—deep into the weeds.

With a minimum of tugging, and with Dad's able assistance, I extricated the hook, dragging a sizable chunk of the lake's vegetation with it. Once that green gunk was pulled away, the crawler was secured and a slightly more subdued cast was employed, I was in business.

Soon my eyes shifted from the bobber to my father. I loved to watch him while we fished. He sat very still, holding the rod and reel in his left hand with the heavy line threaded gently between his thumb and finger in anticipation of the telltale tugging of a fish. I tried to imitate his technique, though all I really needed to do was watch the red and white round bobber that floated on the surface and suspended my own crawler.

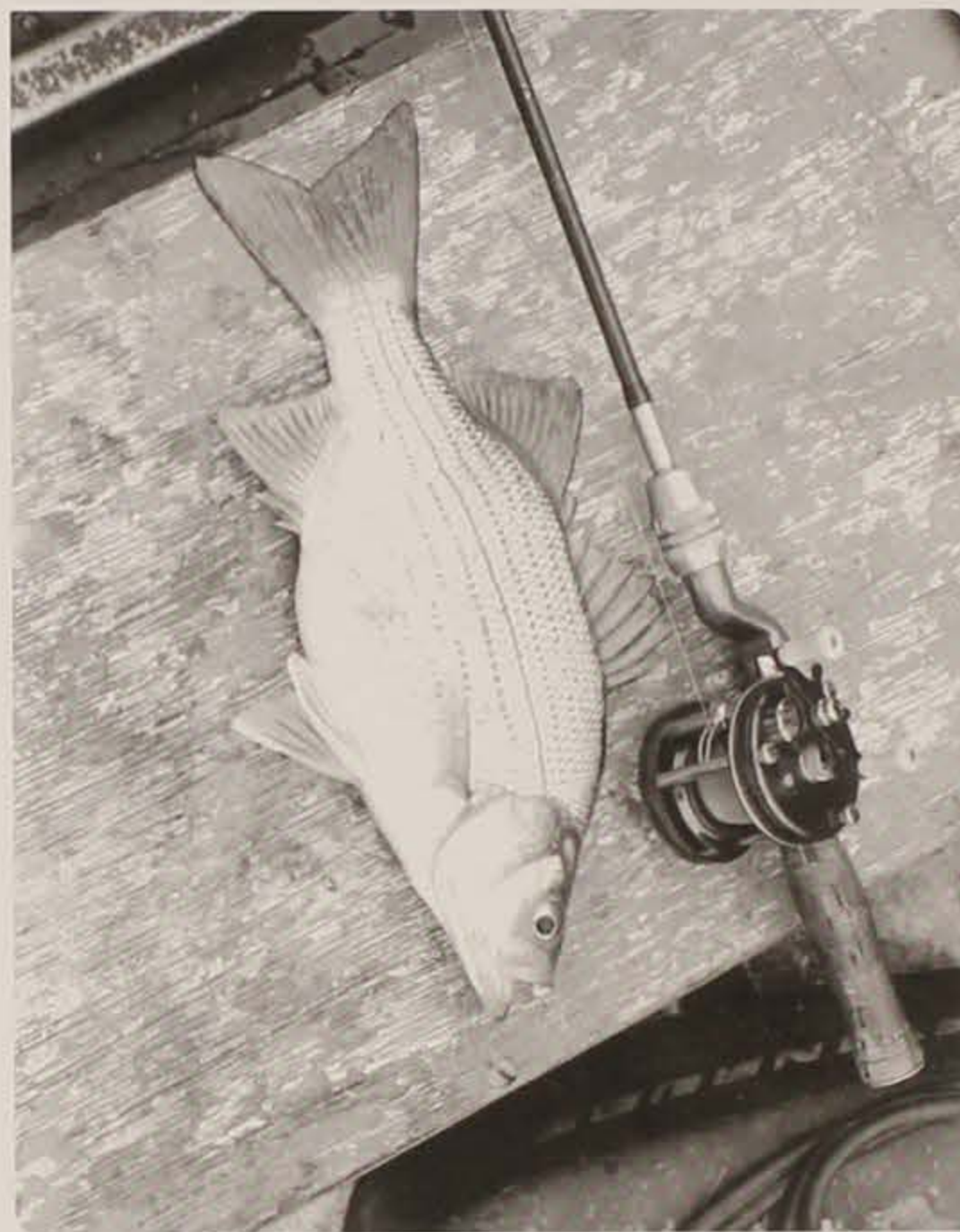
I swear it moved constantly, prompting me to set the hook and begin reeling. Of course, there was no fish, but I did get to cast again, which I greatly enjoyed, and which prompted Dad to say: "Leave it lay, I beg of you;" and as a means of further encouragement,

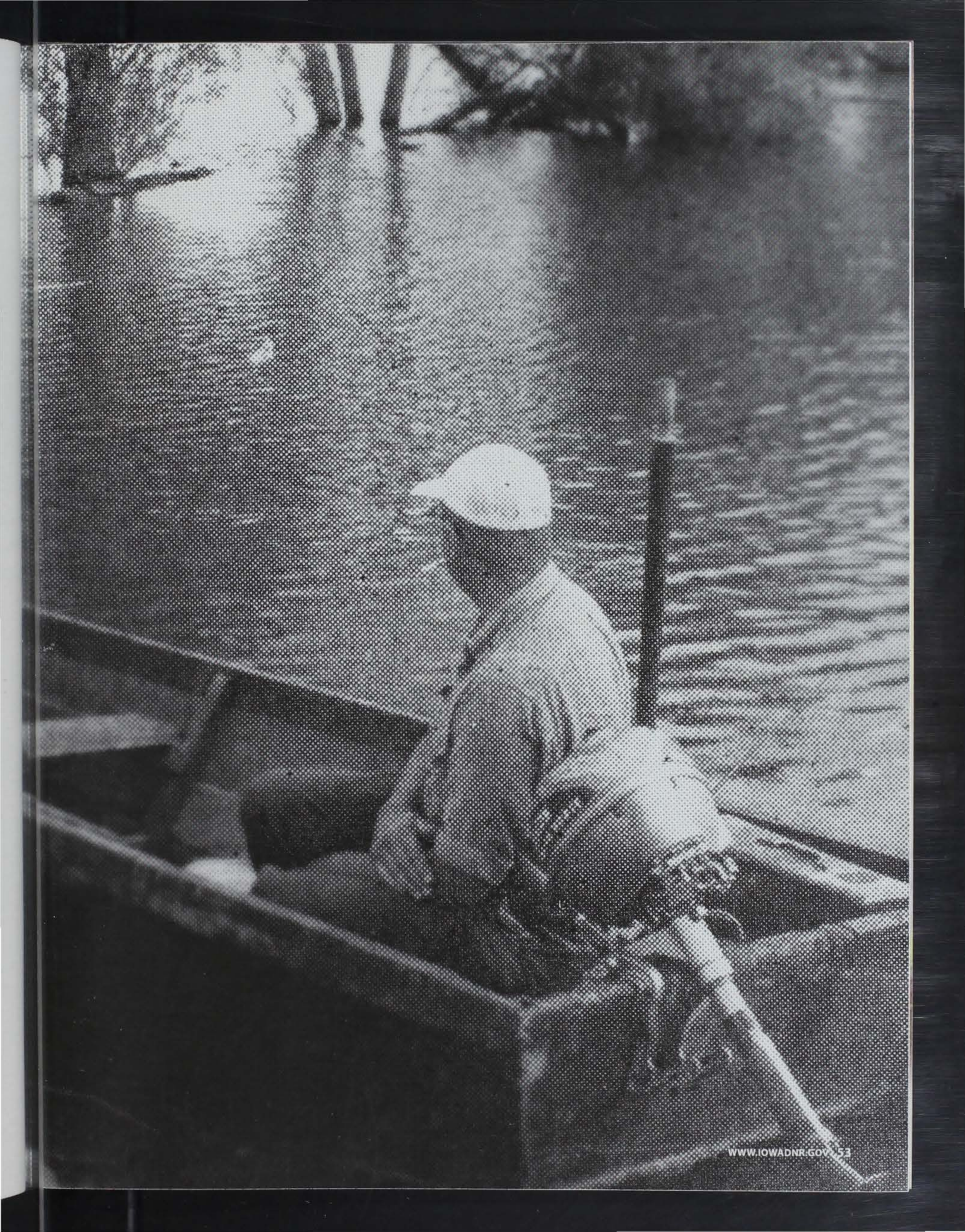
"That's a good spot—you'll catch an alimgator there."

Over time I came to understand that Dad's comments were less expression of his frustration than the more practical truth that my impatience was preventing us from filling the big white bucket that sat between us. Dad had grown up in a poor household and fishing for him would, first and foremost, always be a hunt for food.

We did fill the bucket that morning and most every other morning I accompanied my dad to the lake. The bullheads were nearly always biting and even a novice fisherman, like I was, could usually catch a dozen or more.

And dad carried on—in words and gestures—as though every fish I caught was the biggest and most magnificent ever pulled from the lake. At the time I believed him.





I actually took great pride in helping to fill the bucket, and before too many trips I had developed a greater capacity for patience. It was pretty clear, even to a little boy, that Dad's "leave it lay" method was working far better than my own. And I dearly wanted to show him I could catch fish.

However, I also remember the first time I came to realize that the faster the bucket filled the quicker our day on the water would end. It would never have occurred to me in those days that catching a fish and then letting it go was an option. And such a practice would have been insanity to my dad, who had known hunger as a child.

Thus, I dreaded the inevitable announcement that it was time to head home. I would hold out for as long as possible, casting again and again as Dad secured our gear and retrieved the anchors. As we finally headed for shore, Dad's satisfied smile and words of praise were clearly intended to offset my long face. Our arrival at the dock,

I dreaded the inevitable announcement that it was time to head home.

with a mild thud and a sputtering of the old Johnson, did not improve my mood.

I took one last look at the wonderful boat as we loaded the trunk of Dad's car. I recalled every detail of every fish I had caught that day. Already I hoped the next trip would happen soon. I hoped the fish would be biting too. And my mood lightened as we headed for home.

"Thanks, Dad," I said, "for everything."

Over the years I have come to understand that just as the essence of fishing is hope, so too is the essence of life. Growing up, we hope that every day is filled with fun and joy and happiness. As adults, we hope for the same things, not only for ourselves, but for all those we love.

Today I am much older than my dad was at the time he first took me fishing. Yet I can still picture those wonderful Saturday mornings I shared with him on the lake. They are among my fondest memories.

In fact, I am that little boy again and I don't really care about the greater philosophical meanings I have described above, for I am spending time with my father.

He and I are together in this wonderful old boat on the most beautiful lake in the world. (I am fishing for an alimigator, of course.) It is my greatest joy and greatest wish. It is magical. 🐊





GOING GREEN AT DINNER

Take Advantage of Fresh Foods at Farmers Markets to Reduce Food Miles

Have fun, be social and be green by eating green at farmers markets. Our nation's food supply is trucked across the country, hauled in freighters over oceans, and flown from around the world. Fossil fuel burned to transport foods releases greenhouse gas emissions. Refrigerating fruits, vegetables, dairy products and meats during these journeys burn up even more fossil fuel. In contrast, local and regional food systems produce 17 times less carbon dioxide.

FARMERS MARKET BENEFITS

- Farmers keep 80 to 90 cents of each dollar earned.
- Locally grown produce often uses less packaging.
- The foods grown are planted for taste, not shelf-life, and are fresh, picked at peak ripeness.

VAGABOND VEGGIES

- Food miles are the distance food travels from where it is grown to where it is eaten.
- Food with multiple ingredients can significantly increase food miles since ingredients often originate from several places worldwide.
- Reduce food mile-related greenhouse gas emissions by purchasing local produce. Can, dehydrate, pickle or freeze in-season food to enjoy during the winter.



How Far Does It Travel?

FOOD ITEM	MILEAGE	ORIGIN
Apple <i>(An Iowa-grown apple travels 60 miles on average.)</i>	1,800 miles	Washington
Broccoli	1,800 miles	California
Strawberry Yogurt <i>(Although packaged locally, your yogurt may have more food miles than you think. Fruit, sugar and milk may come from other states.)</i>	2,216 miles	California, Florida, Minnesota, N. Dakota & Iowa
Kid's Meal <i>(A child's fast food meal likely contains ingredients from many growers, domestic and foreign.)</i>	23,000 miles	Worldwide
Strawberries <i>(Fresh berries enjoyed in the middle of winter have accumulated many food miles. Even berries you buy at the grocery store during the summer may not be grown in Iowa. Choose a local berry patch instead.)</i>	1,830 miles	California
Chuck roast with vegetables <i>(If this roast dinner was locally grown, 132 food miles would be totaled.)</i>	12,175 miles	Colorado, Idaho & California
Tomatoes <i>(Between 1983 and 2005, the percentage of imported fruit rose from 30 to 44 percent, and imported vegetables grew from 9 to 16 percent.)</i>	1,569 miles	California & Mexico
A variety of fresh Vegetables <i>(CSA farms provide vegetables and fruit, and sometimes dairy and meat, for pick up or delivery. Prepaid annual subscriptions support this farm operation where growers and consumers share the risks and benefits of food production.)</i>	25 miles	Community-supported agriculture
Home-canned green beans <i>(By canning or freezing your fresh garden produce, you enjoy your garden all year, without the chemicals and preservatives added to many processed foods.)</i>	0 miles	Home Garden

Roast Corn on the Cob

Inexpensive and plentiful, Iowans are awash in sweet corn this time of year. Enjoy plump ears of corn roasting at the campsite and the aromatic smoky sweetness that only grilling can provide. Cooking outdoors is quick and prevents heating up the kitchen on a sweltering summer day.

TO PREPARE

Leave the stalk intact for a handle while eating. Peel back the corn husks, leaving them attached at the end. Remove silk and refold the husk back up over the corn. (Some prefer to remove the silk after grilling, claiming it is easier to remove.) Soak husked corn in cold water, ensuring ears are submerged. Use a plate, if needed, to hold them underwater.

Prepare a medium-hot grill or campfire.

After 15 to 30 minutes, remove ears from the water and shake off excess. Place ears on the grill. Cook 10 to 25 minutes, turning several times to ensure even roasting.

Grilling corn has many slight variations based on individual preferences. One can try several methods over the same fire to quickly find their favorite. Some cooks leave all the husks in place to protect the corn from the fire, steaming the corn but minimizing smoke flavor. Others remove all but a few husk layers, leaving at least a double layer of husks over the cob. The husks may partially burn, permeating the corn with a smoky flavor. To increase the smokiness and change the texture, others pull back all the husks and place the corn, sometimes lightly oiled, directly onto the grill until they reach the desired charring. To do so, grill with husks hanging off the edge of the grill so they don't ignite, and use them as a handle while eating.

NEW FLAVORS

Salt and butter are hard to beat. But also try sprinkling grilled corn with fresh lime juice and a mix of salt and cayenne or chili lime butter.



Fish Tacos

PUT A NEW SPIN ON A CLASSIC FAVORITE AND TURN YOUR DAY'S CATCH INTO A FRESH AND LIGHT MEAL. THESE FISH TACOS ARE AS LIGHT ON THE POCKETBOOK AS THEY ARE ON THE WAISTLINE.

In Mexico, the taco is nothing more than a generic term for a sandwich using the country's version of white bread—the tortilla. Throw whatever you like on one, roll it up and you have a taco. Why not take the taco to new heights by using an Iowa favorite—fresh caught fish. Whether you like your fish fried or grilled, this twist on fresh fish will leave you—dare we say it—rethinking the traditional shore lunch. Plain cabbage or tangy slaw and mango salsa round out this refreshing spin on an old classic.

Any fish will do, but smaller panfish filets like bluegill, crappie or perch work best.

Top tacos with shredded jicama, plain

cabbage, lettuce or tangy slaw. Serve with cilantro crème sauce or fresh pico de gallo and your favorite taco toppings. Fish tacos also pair well with a fruit salsa (see mango salsa recipe).

PICO DE GALLO

1 white onion, finely chopped
4 ripe roma tomatoes, seeded and finely chopped
2 or 3 jalapeño peppers, seeded and finely chopped
½ cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
juice of half a lime
salt and pepper to taste

MANGO SALSA

1 ripe mango, peeled, pitted and diced (about 1 ½ cups)

½ medium red onion, finely chopped
1 jalapeño, minced (include ribs and seeds for a hotter taste if desired)
1 small cucumber, peeled and diced (about 1 cup)
3 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
Salt and pepper to taste

Combine all ingredients in a bowl and stir to mix. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

CILANTRO CRÈME SAUCE

½ cup mayonnaise
½ cup Mexican crema or sour cream
1 tablespoon lime juice
¼ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro



½ packet taco seasoning or
½ teaspoon chili powder

SLAW

Combine all ingredients:

3 cups cabbage, shredded
3 plum tomatoes, diced
1 jalapeño, chopped finely
2 tablespoon lime juice
¼ cup cilantro
fresh garlic

GUACAMOLE

Mix all ingredients:

2 ripe avocados
half a red onion, minced
1 to 2 jalapeños, minced
half a ripe tomato, chopped
1 T lime or lemon juice

1 clove fresh garlic, minced
2 T cilantro, chopped
Coarse salt and fresh ground pepper

CRISPY COATING

1 egg, beaten
½ cup flour
½ cup Japanese panko bread crumbs,
unseasoned bread or corn flake crumbs,
divided in three separate shallow bowls
for dipping

Dip fish pieces in flour, then egg then
crumbs. Deep-fry at 375° or pan-fry
over medium heat until golden brown.

GRILLED FISH

¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
half a package of taco seasoning mix

2 tablespoons lime juice
3 tablespoons olive oil

Mix ingredients and marinate
fish for 30 minutes. Bake or grill at
350° until fish is white and flaky.

BEER BATTER

1 cup self-rising flour
1 cup room temperature beer
1 egg
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon melted butter
Garlic salt and pepper to taste

Mix all ingredients together. Batter
should have consistency of thin
pancake batter. Dip fish and fry
at 375° until golden brown.

BY SHANE HALLENGREN

IOWA PLEISTOCENE SNAIL (*Discus macclintocki*)

You would probably never give this tiny little snail a second glance—that is if you ever got a first glance. Incredibly rare, this endangered species is found only in 37 specific colonies in the world, 36 of which are in Iowa (the other is in Illinois). Even if you do happen upon one, a magnifying glass is helpful as this invertebrate's shell is only 8 mm across at most, making it smaller than a shirt button.



BLAST FROM THE PAST

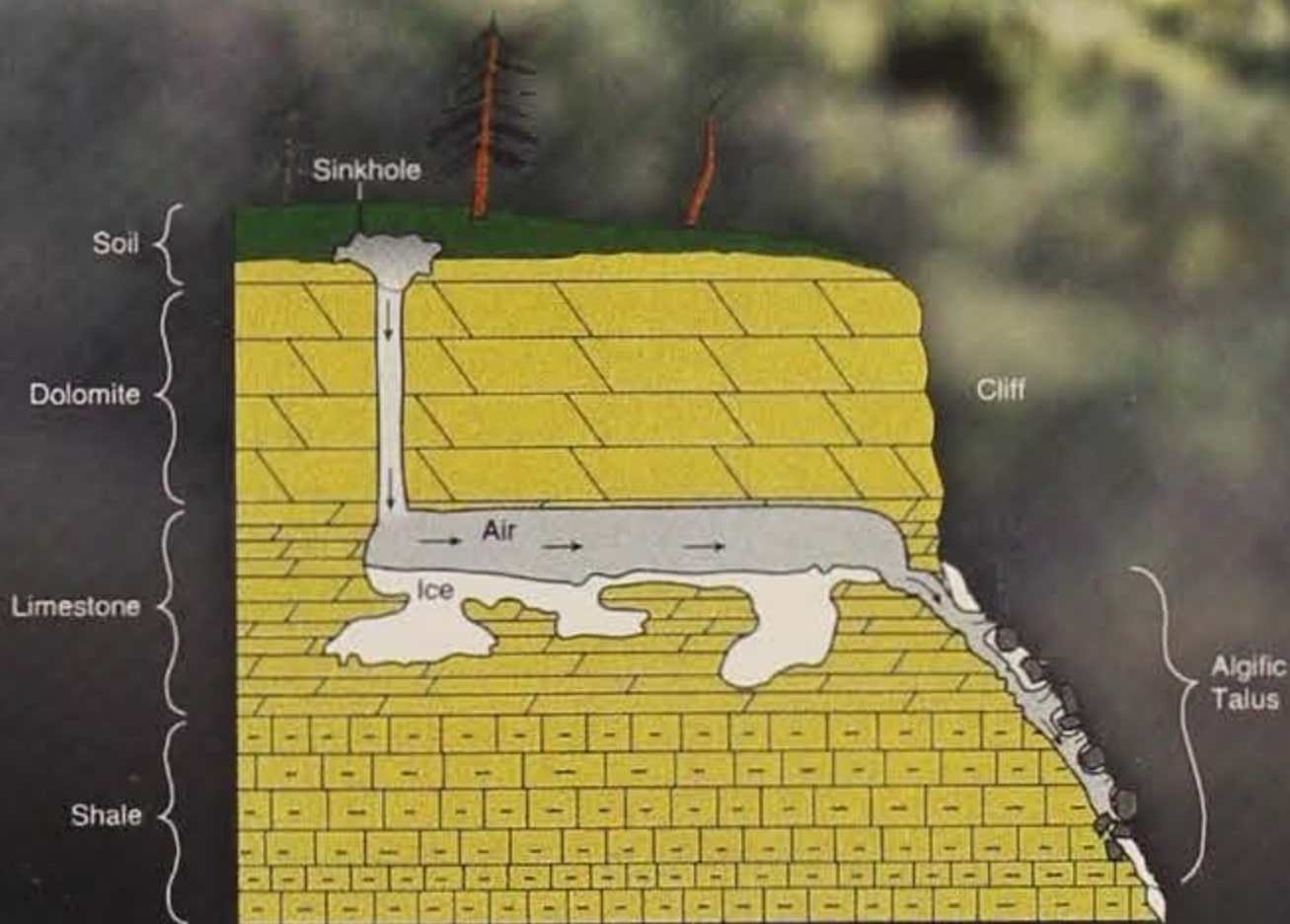
This minuscule mollusk was common throughout the Midwest during the last ice age when glaciers advanced over much of the northern United States. It is one of several species in the upper-Midwest's Driftless Area which are relics of the Pleistocene era, which lasted from 1.6 million to 10,000 years ago.

PICKY EATERS

These little foragers refuse common food sources used by other snails, opting for rarer cuisine. They prefer the wood from white and yellow birch, as well as hard maples. All of these tree species have limited distribution in Iowa, limiting the snail's potential habitat.

FROM EXTINCT TO ENDANGERED

Until the middle of the 20th century, this prehistoric creature was thought to exist only in fossil records. However, in 1955, living colonies were found by a scientist working in northeast Iowa. In 1977, it was placed on the national endangered species list, an unusual upgrade indeed.



YOUNG AND WILD

It takes up to two and a half years, nearly half of its life, for a Pleistocene snail to reach sexual maturity. In most colonies, juvenile snails outnumber adults by as many as 10 to 1. They are also much more active than adults, emerging from winter hibernation much earlier.

KEEP REFRIGERATED

The Iowa Pleistocene snail requires cool temperatures year-round, a climate which mimics their glacial past. Since Iowa's infamous summer weather is far from fitting, the little snail can only survive in the chilled climates of Algific talus slopes found in northeast Iowa. These slopes are vented by subterranean ice, providing year-round temperatures under 45 degrees.

GETTING KIDS ON THE WATER

IOWA RIVERS REVIVAL RIVER RASCALS, DES MOINES
River group gets kids on the water and interested in nature

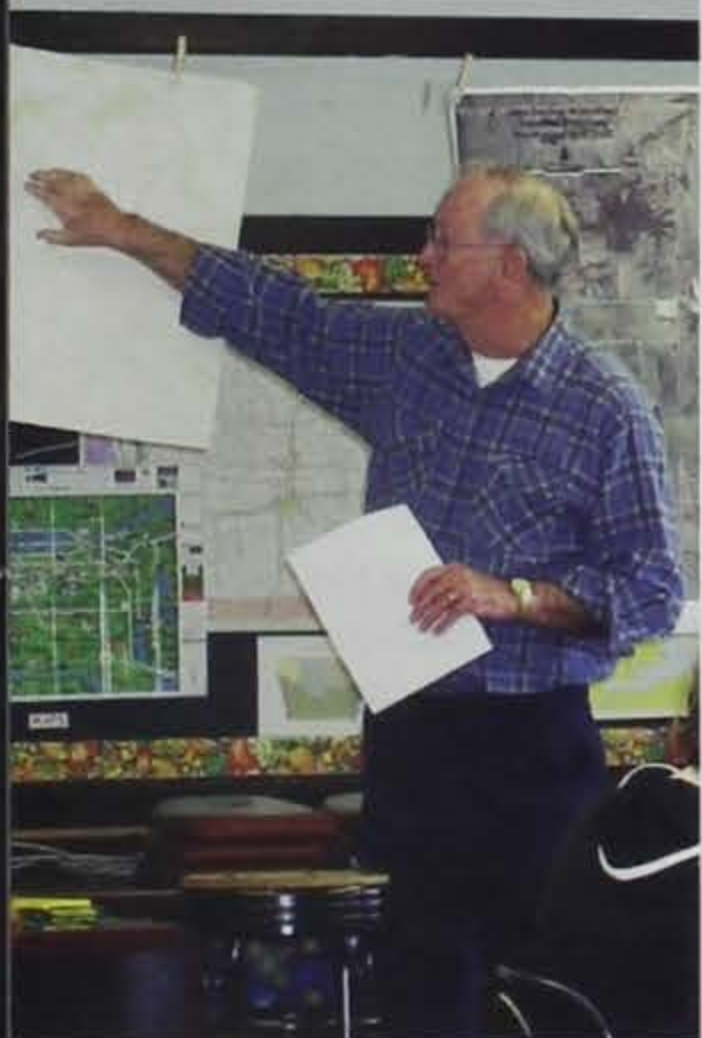
Many kids living just a few blocks from the Des Moines River have never been on the water, and the Iowa Rivers Revival's River Rascals program hopes to change that. In 2009, the IRR board paired with Children and Family Urban Ministries to introduce six kids from Des Moines' Moulton elementary to the river experience. Another six took to the water in 2010. "It's getting kids near water to get an appreciation of it, and urban kids have less of a chance to get on the water," says Rosalyn Lehman, IRR executive director. While the highlight of the program may be taking a canoe trip with an adult paddling mentor, River Rascals learn a lot about the water they're paddling in. "I liked being on the water and just listening to the sound of nature," says sixth grader Quayvon Gowdy. They take nature walks and learn about water issues. "My favorite was when we started collecting bugs, huge spiders, crayfish and frogs. I learned how to canoe and not be scared," says fourth grader Jaedon Green. River Rascals also learn about water quality by taking water samples for IOWATER and participating in River Run Garbage Grab, a community river cleanup. "We learned about how the water flows," says fifth grader Fernando Caceres. The program aims to create a life-long connection to the outdoors for the fifth and sixth graders. "It's an exciting opportunity and it's always cool to try new things," says Gowdy. IRR also works to encourage other communities to start similar programs to get kids on the water. "You need good partners to make program like this work," says Robin Fortney, who helps run the program. For more, visit www.iowarivers.org.



A DARLING CONSERVATIONIST

STAN SIMMONS, WASHINGTON
Long-time conservation leader leaves a legacy at Lake Darling

Retirement doesn't stand in the way of Stan Simmons' efforts for a cleaner Lake Darling. Simmons grew up just outside of the Darling basin on the family farm and has spent his career and retirement working to keep the lake clean. About 20 years ago, he retired from a long career as a technician and district conservationist and ended up as a pond planner. Then 10 years ago, he came out of retirement again to lead the Lake Darling watershed effort. Simmons found ways to bring together farmers, residents and parkgoers to make major improvements in water quality. Known for drumming up interest in meetings by roasting whatever wild catch was in his deep freeze, Simmons had 80 percent of landowners in the watershed working with his project. They installed 162 conservation projects to hold back sediment and nutrients from the lake. About 75 percent of runoff from privately-owned land flows into a terrace or a pond, reducing sediment that reaches the lake by 95 percent. "It's neat to dream up something and see it happen," Simmons says. "I think the lake will be a centerpiece for southeast Iowa." As the project came to a close, Simmons retired once again this winter. "Stan has communicated well with everyone," says Roy Rogers, who has farmed in the watershed since 1944 and worked with Simmons since the 1960s. "Every one of us has benefitted—the farmers and anyone connected with Lake Darling."



ENGINEERING THE FUTURE

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ENGINEERS FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD, IOWA CITY
Student group helps green its campus, community

There's a lot of green mixing with black and gold, thanks to the University of Iowa Engineers for a Sustainable World. The student group works on-campus and in the community on energy efficiency, water quality and environmental education. About 40 students from a range of engineering disciplines—a few non-engineers, too—work closely with the university's Office of Sustainability and Facilities Management to make improvements. The students predict changes based on their lighting audit of North Hall will save \$10,000 in energy costs annually. "We mainly focus on projects with a practical impact on people's lives," says Jon Durst, chapter president. They install energy monitoring devices in Habitat for Humanity houses to help reduce energy use. They hold community events, like green concerts and prescription drug drop-offs, and work with kids to spark an interest in science and math. "I like to see the community involvement. We're actually making a difference," says Jeremy Brill, chapter vice president. As part of helping with the UI's stormwater management plan, the group evaluates locations for rain gardens, which they design and install. The rain gardens filter rainfall, keeping it out of storm sewers and streams. "The students believe very strongly in service to the campus and community, and seeking the practical application of engineering skills for sustainability," says Liz Christiansen, UI sustainability director. For details, visit uiws.org.





Andi's Maiden Voyage

“He put some cake on the hook and lowered the string into the water. Now he had to wait. Would he catch anything on the end of his string? George was curious.” *Curious George Goes Fishing*—H.A. Rey

“I guess you get to take a girl fishing.”

This was the first thing I said to my husband, Tom, after our daughter was born. We didn't need an ultrasound to tell us the sex of our baby—we knew we were having a boy...until it was a girl. It took Andi all of three seconds to have us wrapped around her finger. Tom's cliché dreams of taking his boy fishing were instantly tweaked, and by the time we took Andi home from the hospital, Tom was ready to teach her everything he knew. He couldn't wait to see the smile on her face the first time she caught a fish (probably a monster walleye).

I, on the other hand, was worried. What if she didn't catch anything? She'd never want to go again! What if Tom, (whose patience when it comes to fishing resembles that of a Buddhist monk), became frustrated with Andi for having the patience of a toddler? She'd never want to go again! What if she got poked by the hook? She'd never want to go again!

I felt the pressure to “recruit and retain.” I'd heard this phrase often

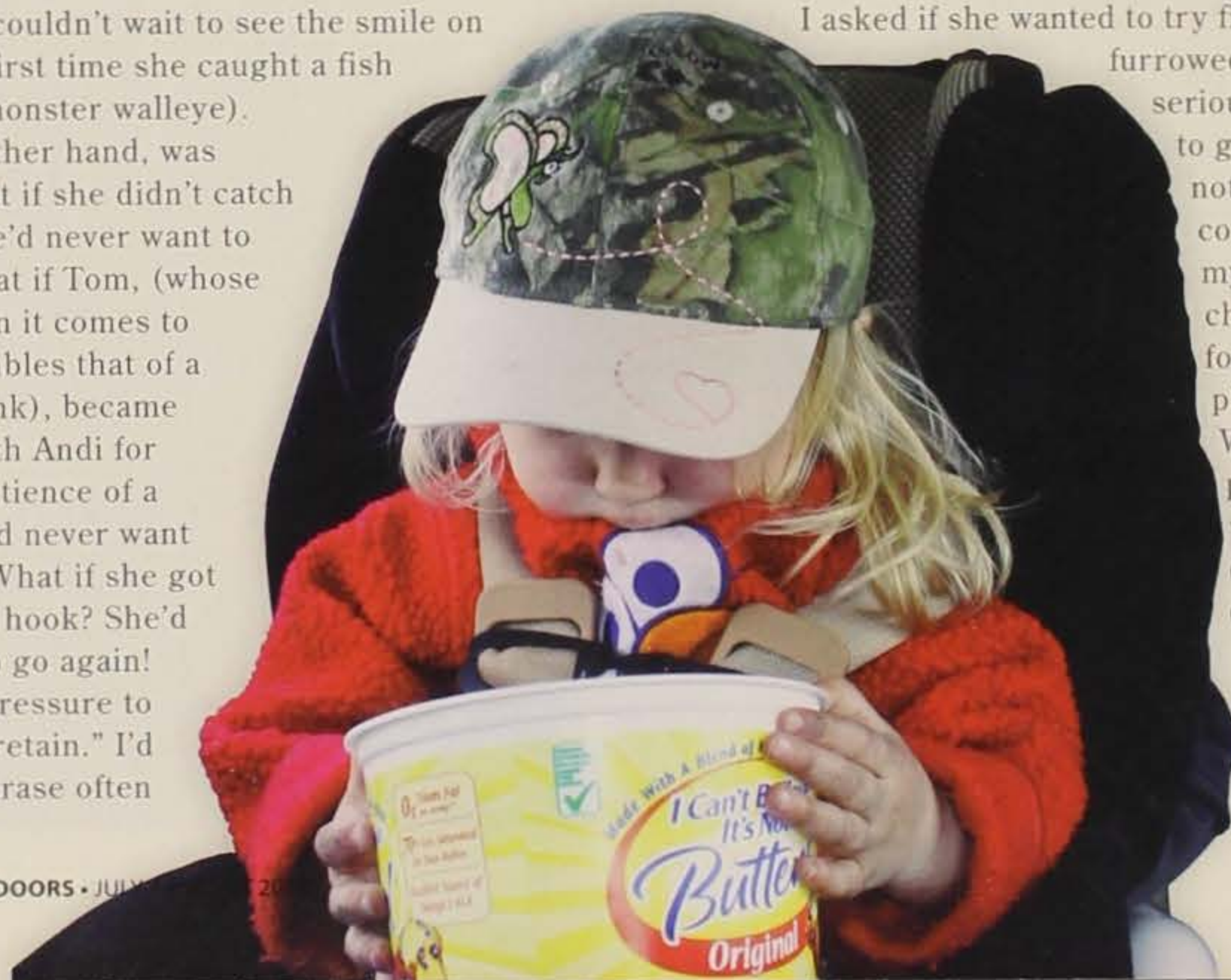
over the last few years. As the number of new hunters and anglers drop, we find one of our most important duties as conservation officers is to encourage young people to pursue an interest in the outdoors. Many officers are involved in mentoring programs which allow kids to try hunting or fishing. The idea is to introduce youngsters to these pursuits and hope that the experience is enough to keep them hooked for life.

What if I failed to “recruit and retain” my own daughter? Soon after Andi was born, I began preparations. We read books about fishing—“*Curious George Goes Fishing*” being her favorite. Whenever we saw someone fishing, I raved about the fun they were having. Whenever

I asked if she wanted to try fishing, she always

furrowed her little brow and said seriously, “With Daddy. I want to go with Daddy.” I tried not to take offense—she could probably sense my anxiety. When I was checking anglers, I asked for opinions about the best place to take a first-timer. Whenever someone promised that my girl would “catch a fish with every cast,” I wrote it down.

Finally, when Andi was two months shy of her third birthday, Tom (the man who never shops),



came home with a new Dora the Explorer fishing rod. I almost cried.

While waving her new rod wildly through the air, Andi declared, "We need cake!" Maybe we read the Curious George book a few too many times. We were finally able to convince her that we do not use cake for bait, nor do we use doughnuts.

Armed with a butter container, Andi and Tom scoured the backyard for worms. They retrieved a few emaciated specimens and we were off to the lake. Certain the worms were going to make a break for it, Andi kept her head bent over the worm

container the whole way. Luckily, when we arrived at one of those "catch a fish with every cast" lakes, all worms were accounted for.

As we walked toward the water a nagging thought leaked from my mouth. "Are those worms big enough? They look kind of scrawny." I instantly regretted it. Without missing a beat, Tom asked, "Do the worms look juicy Andi?"

"Yeah, they look yummy!" she replied. Tom shot me a smug look. I shut my mouth.

We passed one group of anglers packing up their gear. They gave us a dismal fishing report. No bites.

"That's OK," I said, valiantly stifling my pessimistic tendencies, "their worms probably weren't as juicy as ours."

Tom and Andi sat down on the bank and Tom rigged up her line.

"I want to throw it in! I want to throw it in! I want to throw it in!" she said enthusiastically.

Tom let her hold onto the bobber and give it a toss into the water. "Good job," he said, reeling it in and quickly re-casting it.

The instant the bobber hit the water, Andi started shouting, "I want to reel it in! I want to reel it in! I want to reel it in!"



She apparently inherited her patience from me. Tom let her reel it in, then he cast it out again. She reeled it in again. He cast it again.

Realizing that nothing would be caught if we didn't leave the bait in the water for more than three seconds, I finally handed her the container of worms and told her to make sure none escaped. From that moment on, it was all about the worms. She held the worms, she laughed at the worms, she talked to the worms, she named the worms (Rinky, Manny and Moony), she literally worm-hugged the life right out of one (poor

Moony). She seemed to forget she was fishing, which was OK, because the fish weren't interested in the waiflike bait on the end of her line anyway.

"More worms!" Andi said, now excited beyond words. She had discovered the yellow twister tails in the tackle box. She insisted on co-mingling the yellow worms with the real worms "because they are friends." She was all smiles...she never caught a fish.

On the way home we asked, "Did you have fun fishing?" "Yeah!"

"Do you want to go fishing again?"

"With Daddy," she said. Of course.

For two years I worried about this day. I wanted everything to be perfect. And nothing was... except for Andi. She was able to make the most out of a simple afternoon spent with her Daddy.

Another lesson learned from a child. You don't need to be the most knowledgeable, catch the biggest fish or even catch a fish at all. The most important step is to just get the kid out there. They will take care of the rest.

PS: Now three years old, Andi is a seasoned bluegill and sucker catcher. And she still can't get enough of the worms. 🐛

Sierra

I'd have to agree with studies that report companies allowing employees to take their dogs to work have higher rates of job satisfaction and increased productivity. I know my job wouldn't have been the same without my best friend in the passenger seat.

Sierra, my chocolate lab/Chesapeake mix was my partner for more than 11 years. People in my territory had come to expect seeing her. If I happened to leave her home, it wasn't (and still isn't) unusual for numerous people to ask, "Where's your dog?" or "Why'd Sierra have to stay home today?" I'm so used to having her by my side that now I find myself repeatedly telling her empty seat to "Stay" when I get out of the truck.

For generations, conservation officers have routinely taken their dogs to work. We have no official K-9 unit like some law enforcement agencies, but to us they are still our partners and many have proven themselves worthy wardens.

As you might guess, the most useful characteristic our canine wardens possess is their sense of smell. You won't find them sniffing for hidden drugs in a vehicle, but you might find them rooting through weedy edges of a marsh helping a hunter retrieve a lost duck, or "getting birdie" at the scent of a hen pheasant stashed under a pile of sticks by someone desperate to hide their mistake.

Retired supervisor Mike Ashby's black lab, Dugan, made Mike's only spring duck hunting case of his career possible. After a couple suspicious people Mike spotted at a pond denied shooting any ducks, Dugan managed to sniff out a freshly killed scaup hidden deep in the rushes at water's edge. The poachers couldn't deny the evidence clutched in Dugan's mouth and quickly confessed their wrongdoing.

Aric Sloterdijk found his black lab Abby's fierce loyalty helpful when he was surrounded by a group of irate fishermen. Following one command from Aric, Abby jumped from the truck's open window, ran to Aric's side and sat down with her ears laid back in warning. By her mere presence, Abby quickly diffused a situation that could have ended much differently.

Dallas Davis trained his black lab, Kate, in the art of firearms detection. Kate is skilled at sniffing out spent shotgun shells, bullet casings, bows and blood, and has assisted Dallas in making several cases. She helped with several turkey cases



by sniffing out spent shotgun shells in fields where turkeys were illegally killed. She assisted with a case by locating quarter-sized drops of deer blood on a vast southern Iowa forest floor. Dallas connected that blood evidence to an Iowa deer shot on a Missouri license.

Kate showed her expertise by finding a compound bow stashed in a ravine beneath a deep layer of dead leaves by an unlicensed deer hunter. Once, needing to search a large area, Dallas commanded Kate to find a gun. Since Kate was trained to find firearm evidence, Dallas hoped she would make the connection and find a bow instead. He was pleasantly surprised when Kate indicated her find by quickly and excitedly sitting. Dallas repeated the command to ensure she wasn't mistaken. With that, Kate stood up, shoved her nose deep beneath the leaves, took a good whiff and immediately sat again with a big old lab grin on her face.

I waited a long time for the day Sierra would save the day by helping me make a big case. It never happened. Over the years I watched her chocolate fur turn gray, her lean body slowly thicken around the middle and the spring in her step become more of a hobble. She slowed even more after developing a cancerous tumor on her rib cage and began spending her time on patrol asleep in the seat next to me. Finally, a month before her 12th birthday, Sierra's valiant effort to fight a massive tumor on her spleen faltered, and I chose to put my partner down. Even

though she was never a canine warden hero, I don't regret a day she spent with me.

She was my extra pair of eyes. At times she alerted me in pitch black nights that she had spotted a deer ready to cross the road in front of my truck. Her deep chest rumble warned me many times, long before I was aware of it, that someone was emerging from a timber or field. Sierra's presence provided me a sense of security as I roamed dark, dirt roads in the middle of the night. Her amber eyes looked deep into mine while listening to my frustrations and sharing in my excitement of this job.

Sierra's friendly face at the truck window encouraged countless people to approach my truck who otherwise wouldn't have, just so they could scratch behind her ears. As she sat there soaking up attention, these people would often talk and share useful information. She was my entertainment on numerous occasions. When she was about seven years old, I heard her howl for the first time when she sat bolt upright in her seat and protested a song playing on the radio.

Finally, she was there when I needed to bury my face in her thick coat and take a deep breath before going home to my own family after spending the day with the family of a father who had accidentally killed his son while deer hunting early that morning.

Nope, I wouldn't have traded Sierra for all the super-star Lassies in the world. After spending hours suffering through baby screaming and 2-year-old finger prodding, poking and pulling, Sierra's ears perked up and she ran for the front door whenever I put on my uniform. She lived to go to work, and sometimes, just by the look in her eye, she motivated me to get out there on days that I lacked the motivation myself.

My truck is a lonelier place now. Sierra's collar hanging from the rearview mirror serves as a reminder to me how privileged I was to have such a caring, enthusiastic and entertaining partner. I'm reminded how lucky I had been for almost 12 years to ask my girl every morning, "Wanna go for a ride?" 🐾



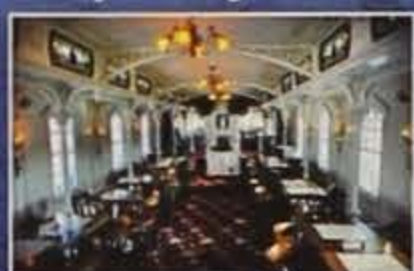
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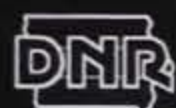


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