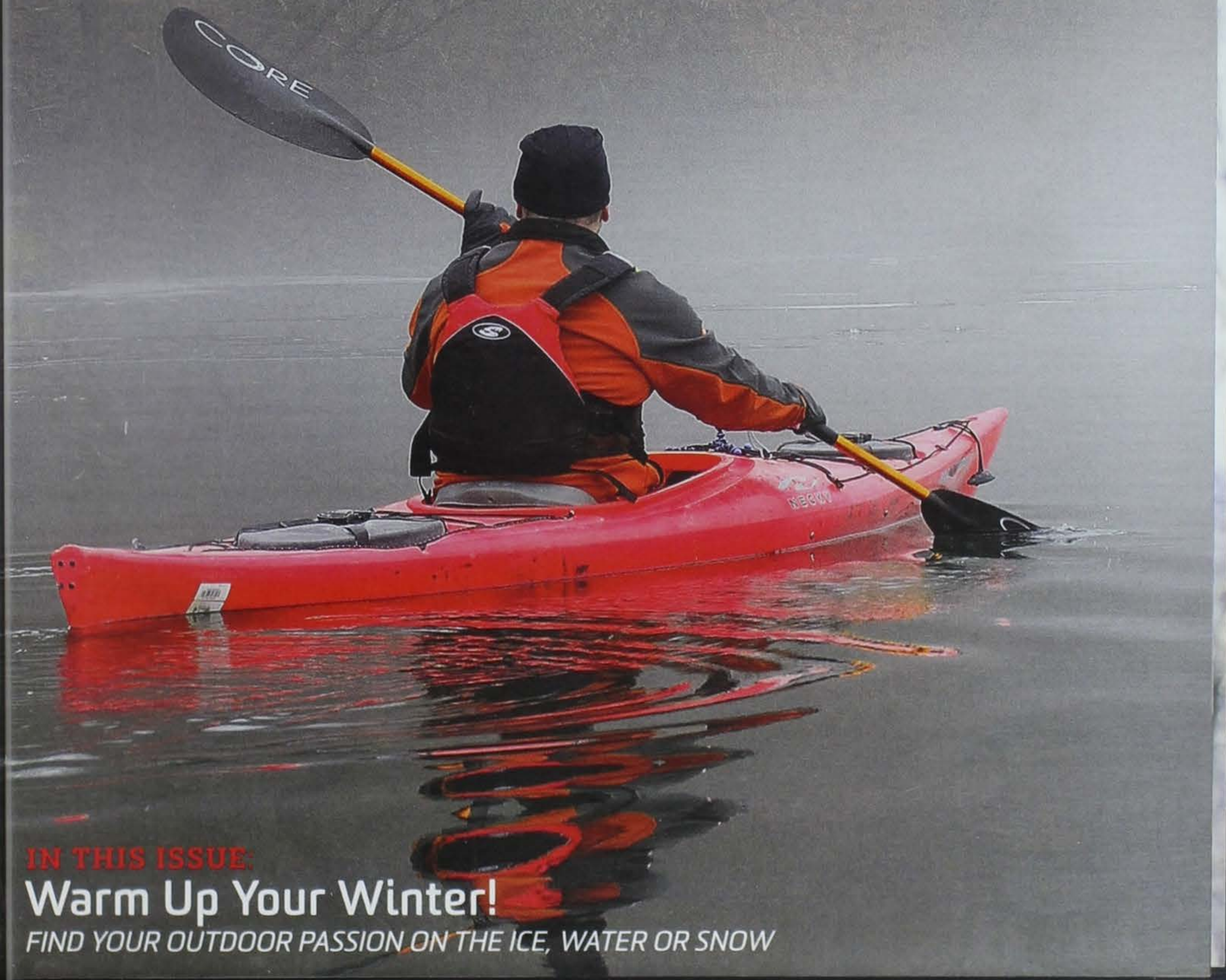


JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2017

IOWA OUTDOORS

THE DNR'S MAGAZINE OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION



IN THIS ISSUE:

Warm Up Your Winter!

FIND YOUR OUTDOOR PASSION ON THE ICE, WATER OR SNOW

A SEASON FOR ALL

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IOWA

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Winter Home for Bald Eagles
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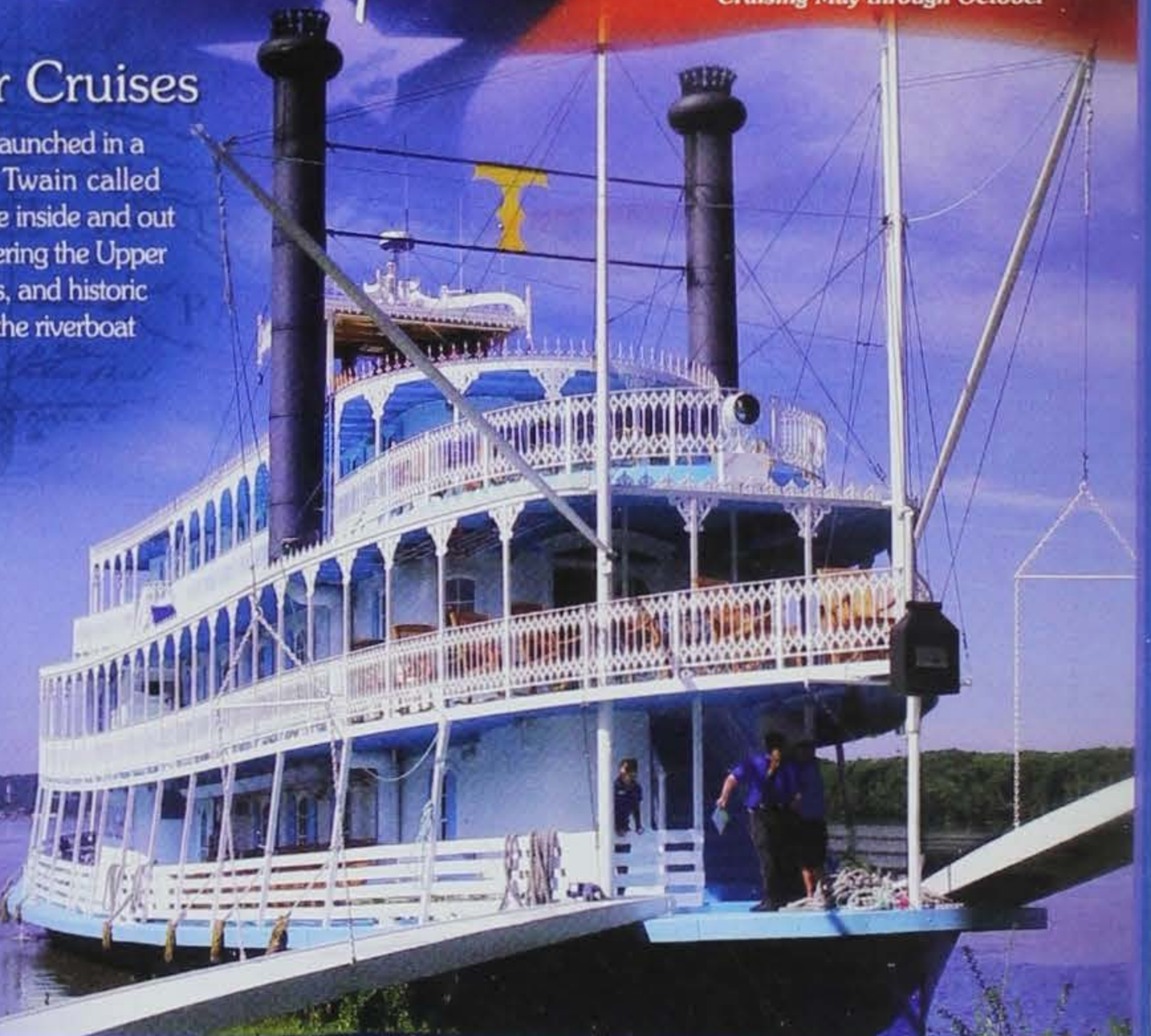
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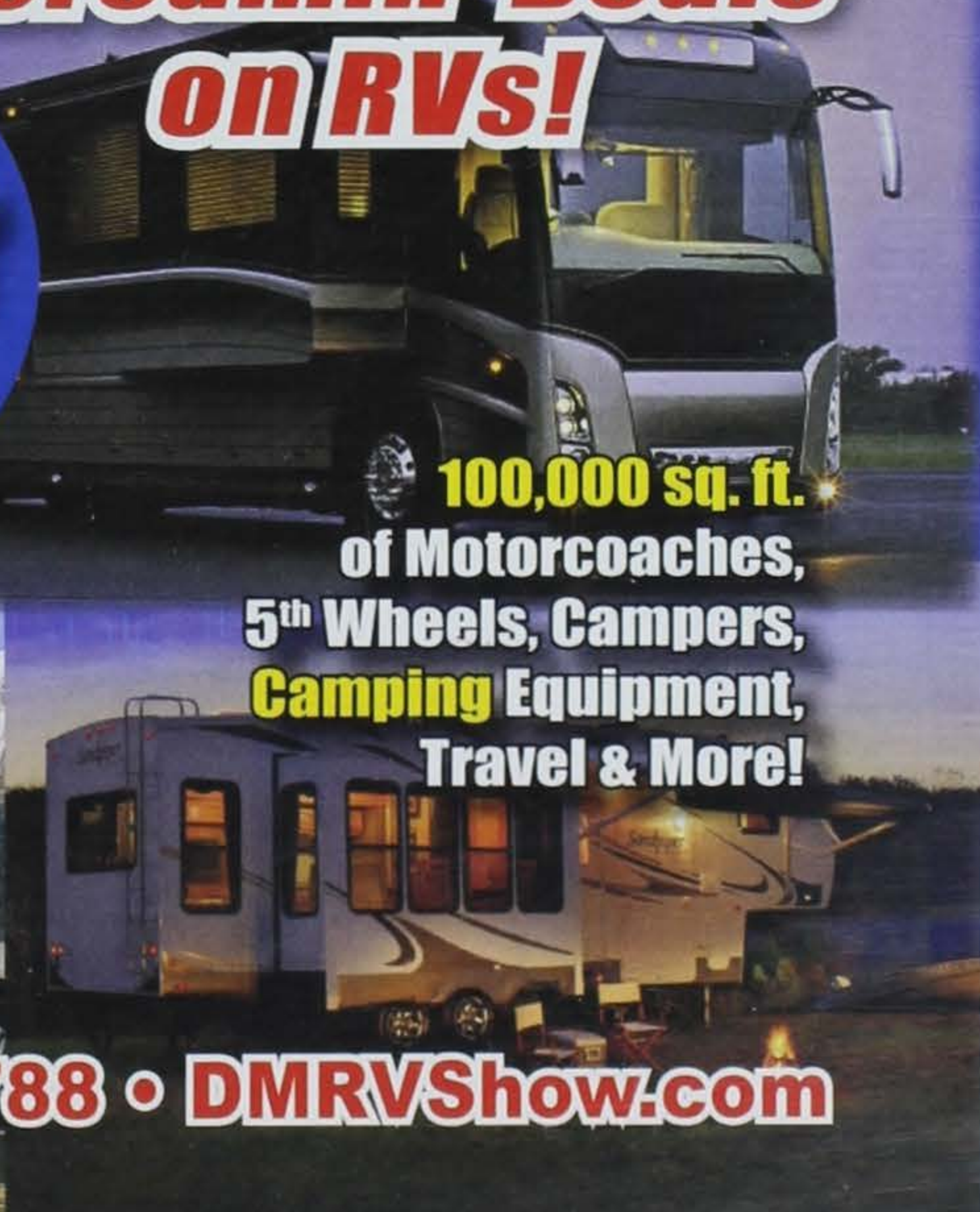
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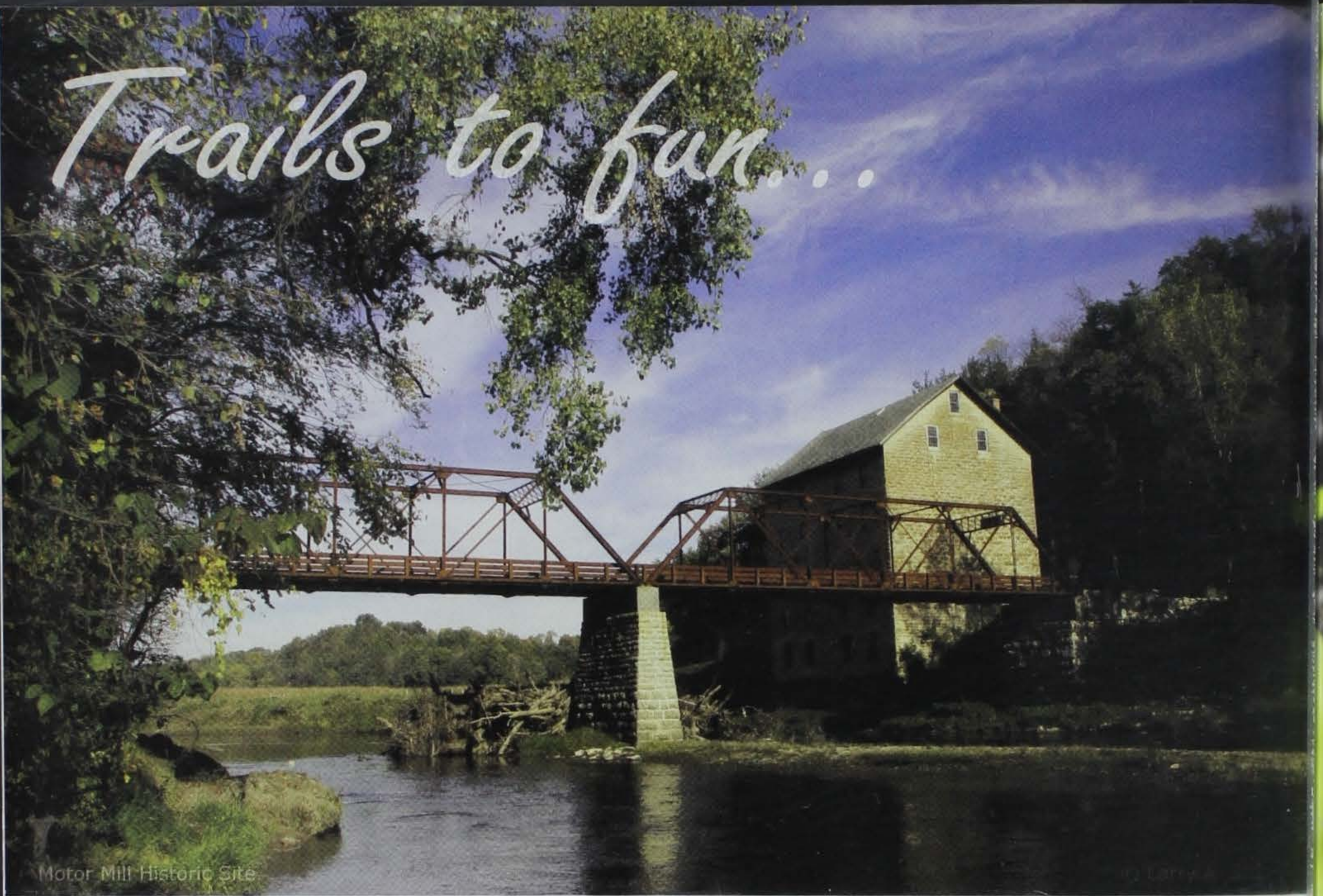
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Turkey River Recreational Corridor Mission:

Connect Clermont, Elgin and Elkader to develop and enhance the existing natural resource base through the creation of land and water trails to serve as the catalyst for economic growth and development.



A close-up photograph of a child's hand holding a large, brown and white feather. The child is wearing an orange shirt. The background is a blurred green field. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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Get an easier cup of camp joe with single-serving packets; save bread sack ties for handy clothespins; learn the secret of identifying Norway spruce and learn to put old clothes to new use.

11 Together

Build a better landscape with native plants and find out why hunter fatalities have dramatically declined over the decades.

18 Lost in Iowa

Don't let Old Man Winter spoil your outdoor fun. Chase away the winter blues with these popular cold weather activities.

58 Wild Cuisine

Make this hearty staple a favorite at your table tonight with inexpensive ingredients you likely already have.

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

The tried and true way of getting kids hooked on nature is getting them outdoors in the first place. That's what's happening in Johnson County, where DNR conservation officer Erika Billerbeck is leading the after school program, "Wild Things." The message is simple: It's OK to get dirty, muddy and wet. Read more in Warden's Diary pages 60-63.

PHOTO BY ERIKA BILLERBECK

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ABOUT THE COVER

While winter is filled with outdoor opportunities, cold weather paddling is arguably one of the most exhilarating. For the past 25 years, author and photographer Kip Ladage and a friend kick off each year with a New Year's Day paddle. It has caught on with other paddlers, and they want you to join them, too. Get tips from a seasoned winter paddler, then find out how to join the group's next paddle in Ladage's story, *Cold Weather Paddling*, on pages 42-49.

PHOTO BY KIP LADAGE

ABOUT THIS PHOTO

Celebrating the New Year on the Cedar River in Waverly has become a local tradition. There are a few hardy souls in this state who refuse to hang up their paddles or beach their boats when temperatures fall and snow flies. While there are challenges associated with winter paddling not normally encountered in the summer, following some precautions can put you on course for coldwater paddling. Gear up for this winter experience on pages 42-49.

PHOTO BY KIP LADAGE

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28 Coyote Versus Wolf

Wolves once inhabited Iowa, but haven't for well more than a century. Now the wandering canines are occasionally showing up. Here's how to tell the difference between a wolf and the abundant coyote.

BY MARIAH GRIFFITH

32 Cottontails and Life Lessons

Many youngsters cut their hunting teeth on cottontails and bushytails. And in some cases, like for the author, those days helped shape lives.

BY DAN MAGNESON

40 Tooth and Fang

In the high-stakes game of wildlife survival, there are no politics, tradeoffs or compromises. Only a winner and a loser.

42 Cold Weather Paddling

Winter doesn't mean the end to paddling. It just means you have to play the game a little smarter.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIP LADAGE

50 Action Cameras

Weatherproof and small, these durable cameras are becoming more a part of outdoor activities such as hunting, paddling and biking. Learn what you need to know before going shopping.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIP LADAGE



Contributors



DAN MAGNESON grew up in the southwest Iowa towns of Red Oak, Shenandoah and Clarinda, and today works as a fisheries biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula. He believes the 1950s and 1960s were the absolute golden era of being a kid, and that nowhere on earth was this more true than in Iowa.



KIP LADAGE is an outdoor photographer and writer living in Tripoli. Look for him paddling Sweet Marsh or the Wapsipinicon River, or exploring the many other wildlife haunts of Bremer County. His work has been published around the world in books, magazines and reference materials. To view more of his images, search "Kip Ladage" on the Internet.

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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 in Iowa 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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DNR volunteer programs help Iowans give back to lands, waters and skies. 515-725-8261 or iowadnr.gov/volunteer

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



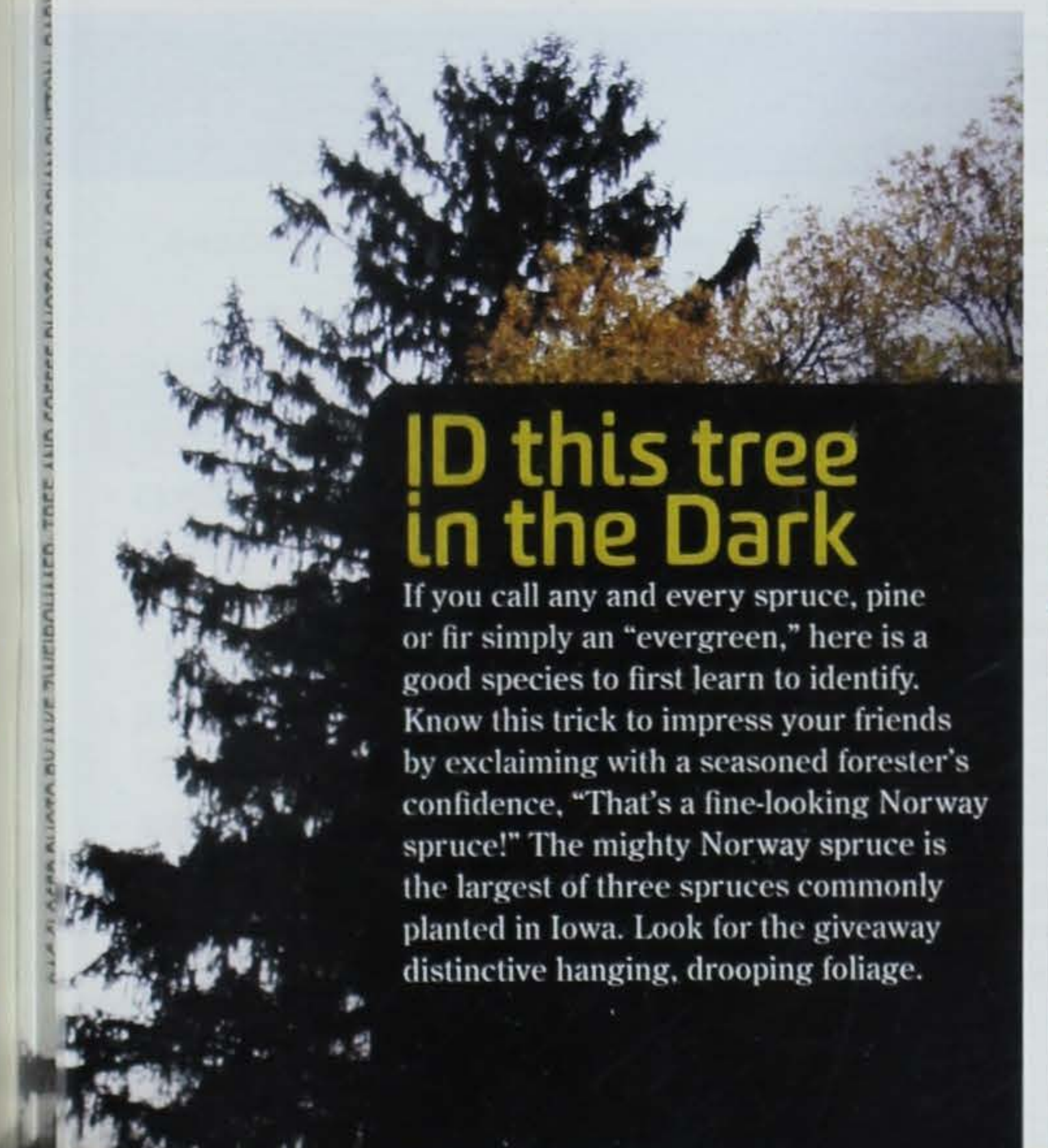
Stocking Stuffers for Camp

Here's a useful stocking stuffer for outdoors lovers: After sipping every type of "camp coffee" made from percolators, backcountry filter drip, boiled cowboy java and even whole raw beans roasted over an open fire—here's a delicious, no fuss option. For a quick and really good morning cup of Joe, try single-serving sized packets of Starbucks or Nescafe Taster's Choice instants. The packets take little space versus a coffee can or heavy, breakable glass jars common to instant varieties. (And who knew, but those Nescafe packets are made in Waverly.)



Bread Bag Closer Clothespin

Thin and lightweight, keep some of these bag ties with your outdoor gear. They make a great space-saving replacement for clothespins. This simple device got us wondering about its history. While on a flight in 1952, Floyd Paxton opened a bag of peanuts. Then he realized he had no way to reclose it. Pulling an old credit card from his wallet, he carved his first bag closer with a pocketknife—the rest is history.



ID this tree in the Dark

If you call any and every spruce, pine or fir simply an "evergreen," here is a good species to first learn to identify. Know this trick to impress your friends by exclaiming with a seasoned forester's confidence, "That's a fine-looking Norway spruce!" The mighty Norway spruce is the largest of three spruces commonly planted in Iowa. Look for the giveaway distinctive hanging, drooping foliage.



DIY Baby Bunting

Put some unused threads to good use and get the new kiddo outdoors this winter. Use a fleece coat or vest and stitch the bottom closed. Tuck coat sleeves inside or cut them off and sew both holes closed. Ta-da! A snuggly, zippered and winterized baby bunting!

WINTER RABBITS ARE SAFER TO EAT THAN FALL RABBITS?

Urban legend claims rabbits are unfit to eat before the first hard fall frost, based on the fear of rabbits having parasitic worms or tularemia, a bacterial infection called rabbit fever.

While precautions should be taken when handling meat of any kind—wild or store-bought—most risks are easily remedied by proper handling, care and cooking.

The USDA says rabbit meat is safe to consume before or after the first frost so long as it's thoroughly cooked to an internal temperature of 160 degrees. This kills any bacteria or parasites left in the meat, and should be checked with a meat thermometer in several places to ensure the entire cut is ready. So wild rabbit meat is essentially no different than any other meat.

Parasitic worms are generally easy to spot in a rabbit's flesh or fur. Skinning may remove them, or the meat can be discarded as appropriate. Tularemia, a bacterial disease commonly transmitted through direct contact with an infected individual or external blood parasites like fleas and ticks, does not usually leave blemishes on the meat. However, the infection may cause the animal to run a high fever and act in a strange, lethargic manner,

which should be noted while hunting.

While a significant number of the parasites that transmit them are killed by a hard frost, both of these can affect rabbits any time of year. Frost does not guarantee that a parasite already attached to an animal will die, so even a rabbit harvested in winter should be inspected thoroughly.

Small game biologist Todd Bogenschutz agrees rabbits are safe to eat before the first frost, but reminds Iowans that the rabbit season doesn't start until the fall anyway.

"No matter what season, I tell people if the animal was behaving strangely or the meat appears suspect in any way, it's better to discard it," Bogenschutz says.

In short, rabbits can contract diseases and parasites any time of year, so specifically eating winter rabbits only slightly lessens the already low risk of coming in contact with afflicted individuals. Avoiding contact with ill-looking animals and wearing rubber gloves during cleaning and cooking game appropriately minimizes your health risk at any time of year.



Ask THE Expert *How does weather affect landfill operations? -Mitch in Altoona*

Many factors affect the operation of a landfill, says Iowa's largest landfill serving the greater Des Moines metropolitan area, but few have more impact than weather. Just like the weather has a tremendous effect on our daily lives, it has some of the very same influences on Metro Park East Landfill.

WET CONDITIONS

Rain and mud impact landfills most, primarily due to traction loss for off-loading garbage at the daily disposal area—called the "working face." When dry, trucks take their loads directly to the working face. However, even a 1/4-inch of rain may force the operation to the "wet weather pad," a temporary location that is stable, flat and has a rock base. The garbage is dumped on the pad, then pushed to the working face by bulldozers.

WINTER WEATHER CONDITIONS

Perfect working conditions are when the ground is frozen and temperatures are below zero, when the working surface is solid. It's when snow and ice come into play that things get dicey. Ice storms are dangerous. Even heavy equipment with tracks slip and slide, and the trucks scoot all over, creating the same "traffic" hazards we all face on ice.

Heavy snowfall creates other issues. When snow is in the forecast, Metro Waste employees are on call for road and walkway snow removal. Winter weather also affects the type of cover put on the landfill at night. Large tarps, the norm, freeze to the ground, making it difficult or impossible to remove without damaging them. Soil can also be used, but in the midst of a snow or ice storm, it is challenging to work with as

well. Thus, an expensive spray foam is used instead during winter weather.

Sun also presents a challenge. The sun's rays warming the top layer of unpaved surfaces results in a soft, wet and slippery driving experience regardless of temperature. Cue the wet weather pad.

HIGH WINDS

Wind poses the obvious challenge of blowing litter. Metro Park East Landfill has dozens of portable, high fences that deter items, such as plastic bags, from escaping the facility. It also has litter vacuums on pickup trucks that clean up anything that does blow away.

Regardless of weather, most of the time it is business as usual. In fact, for more than 20 years, Metro Park East has only closed once due to weather, on Dec. 20, 2012, when more than a foot of snow fell and high winds produced blizzard conditions for several days.

ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



WINTER FITNESS

As we Iowans were gifted a warm and lengthy stretch of above normal temperatures well into November, and the landscape provided its usual magnificent leafy display of autumn fireworks, there weren't a lot of good excuses for being inactive outdoors. Even the animals were busy getting ready for the winter onslaught.

But by the time this magazine entered your mailbox, frost, nip, and chill, snow and hypothermia may be factors facing anyone wishing to venture out to that same landscape. I am thus concerned that many Iowans may be in hibernation. If the Cubs can win the World Series, anything is possible and you can get active outdoors in winter.

Today's reason for getting out and about has to do with mental health. In past columns, I have attributed the benefits of outdoor activity for mental health as entirely due to endorphins. But as it turns out, I was only half right. A recent *Journal of the American Medical Association Psychiatry*, I was informed of research that ties elevated heart rates and blood pressure with obsessive-compulsive disorder and even schizophrenia.

As it turns out, "a high resting heart rate and blood pressure in youth predict an increased susceptibility for anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder later in life..."

The research in Sweden used heart rate and blood pressure measurements from individuals enlisted in the Swedish army that compared heart rates and patient records. The results indicate that men whose resting heart rate was higher than 82 beats per minute during their youth were 69 percent more likely to later be diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder than men whose resting heart rate was lower.

There are a multitude of concerns to be addressed with winter activity, but there are methods of preventing getting chilled or addressing other winter risks. I know I am a broken record here, but the list of benefits from being active outdoors keeps growing. First and foremost, it is easier to stay active through the winter than go through an annual spring training period or returning to a healthy activity. I would also point out that in many sports, take biking for example, the industry has been more than diligent in adapting equipment and clothing to fight the elements.

Once upon a time, while traveling to Waterloo for Christmas, I was stranded at the intersection of Highway 20 and I-35. I was safe in my vehicle, but outside the wind was ferocious and the temperature was well below zero. The view was awe-inspiring. For the record, on such days I strongly suggest a break or perhaps an exercise or treadmill. But on typical winter days, I suggest the most valuable public health resource there ever was...the great outdoors with unlimited options and a growing list of benefits.

To learn more about winter safety tips, visit the Mayo Clinic website and their winter safety recommendations. Go to mayoclinic.org and search "winter fitness."

TIM LANE is a nationally recognized authority on public health and physical activity. He is past president of the Iowa Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

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ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

WARM UP AT INDOOR SPORT SHOWS

Stave off winter chills and dream about fishing and camping season by spending an afternoon at one of numerous sports and vacation shows. Two central Iowa shows are the Des Moines RV & Outdoor Show and the Des Moines Boat & Sport Show.

Browse a wide selection of boats and ATVs, book a hunting or fishing trip or get a first-hand peek at the latest hunting and fishing equipment at the Des Moines Boat & Sport Show at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Seminars will fire you up for the summer season, view astonishing deer racks, catch a hunting seminar and learns tips, tricks and recipes for mushroom hunting. Show dates are Jan. 6, 1 to 7 p.m., Jan. 7, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Jan. 8 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; DesMoinesBoatShow.com.

See the newest motorcoaches, travel trailers, fifth wheels and campers at the Des Moines RV and Outdoor Show at the Iowa Events Center. Catch a hunting seminar, or watch a wild game cooking show. Event dates are Jan. 20 from noon to 7 p.m., Jan. 21 from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Jan. 22 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; DMRVShow.com.

While in town travel the Des Moines River, from the Scott's Street Dam to the SE 14th Street bridge to view wintering eagles.

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Together



GET INSPIRED WITH NEW BOOK, "GARDENING WITH NATIVE PLANTS IN THE UPPER MIDWEST."

Native plant gardens are not only a burgeoning trend—they are a relatively new idea. And there is no better time than this winter to get inspired and dream up your own planting to put into motion this spring.

In her new book, long-time landscape designer and Iowan Judy Nauseef shows upper Midwest gardeners how to restore habitat and diversity to their piece of the neighborhood by making native plants part of well-designed, thoughtfully planned gardens.

Creating comfortable, low-maintenance spaces will bring homeowners outside to enjoy the beauty. And unlike

many sources, this inspiring and useful work focuses on plant, soil and growing conditions found here. It is a functional book that instructs how to make beauty reality and create an outdoor place to enjoy. From large plantings to accents along paths, patios, pergolas and steps, this book covers a range of possibilities using native plants as well as gardens that mix nonnative with native species.

"Gardeners continually search for opportunities to make their gardens more interesting, beautiful and productive," she writes. Her book shows that native plants add exciting options and solutions. The photos prove these planting are

MAIN PHOTO COURTESY JACK PIZZO



About the Author

Judy Nauseef is a landscape design professional in Iowa City. In addition to creating custom gardens for clients, she earned a B.A. in Literature and Art and an M.A. in Communications. She has written for numerous garden and landscape publications and maintains a collection of books and journals on plants and landscape design. She is a member of the Garden Writers Association. With more than 25 years experience, Nauseef is past president of the Association of Professional Landscape designers and Iowa Nursery and Landscape Association certified. She has won awards from the Perennial Plant Association. The owner of Judy Nauseef Landscape Design, she lives on an acreage in Johnson County. For more, visit judynauseeflandscapedesign.com and songsforthegarden.com.

not only pretty, but gorgeous, adding curbside appeal to homes no matter urban, suburban or acreages. In short, this book not only inspires, it instructs.

Beyond beauty, Nauseef exudes the virtues of improving properties with wondrous plant combinations that bolster beneficial insects, butterflies and attract birds.

After perusing over the photos and imaging such beauty surrounding your own home, the book continues to serve with an overview of the basics of planning and design. Nauseef addresses common issues with shade, sun and moisture and covers useful, proven methods for

planting and maintenance.

The book includes four pages of additional resources, such as seed and plant sources, places to visit, reference books and supporting organizations.

How to Order

Gardening with Native Plants in the Upper Midwest: Bringing the Tallgrass Prairie Home by Judy Nauseef. A Bur Oak Guide. 132 pages, 75 color photos. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-60938-407-4. Published April 2016. Obtain at bookstores or order directly from the University of Iowa Press at **800-621-2736** or uiopress.org.

IOWA HUNTING FATALITIES DROP

Back in the 1940s, roughly the same number of Iowans hunted as today—about 200,000, but hunting-related fatalities were nearly 40 times higher. Data shows tremendous decreases every decade in hunting fatalities, from more than 336 in the 1940s to nine during the 2000s and four so far in the 2010s.

There are varying reasons for the dramatic safety improvements. Some are obvious, others not so much.

Iowa's hunter safety education program began in November 1960, and in 1963, a hunter safety officer was appointed to better coordinate the program. From 1962 to 1964, 8,120 boys and girls graduated from the program.

In 1983, hunter safety education became mandatory, says Megan Wisecup, the DNR's hunter education administrator. Since then, close to 750,000 residents have become certified, and up to another 12,000 are certified annually.

"We definitely can see when hunter education came into play—there is a significant drop off of incidents in the 1960s," she says. "Again in 1983—when education became mandatory—fatalities dropped almost in half."

Hunter visibility also factored in to earlier hunter fatalities, says Wisecup. Blaze orange didn't become popular for upland game until the 1990s, slightly earlier for deer hunting, before becoming mandatory.

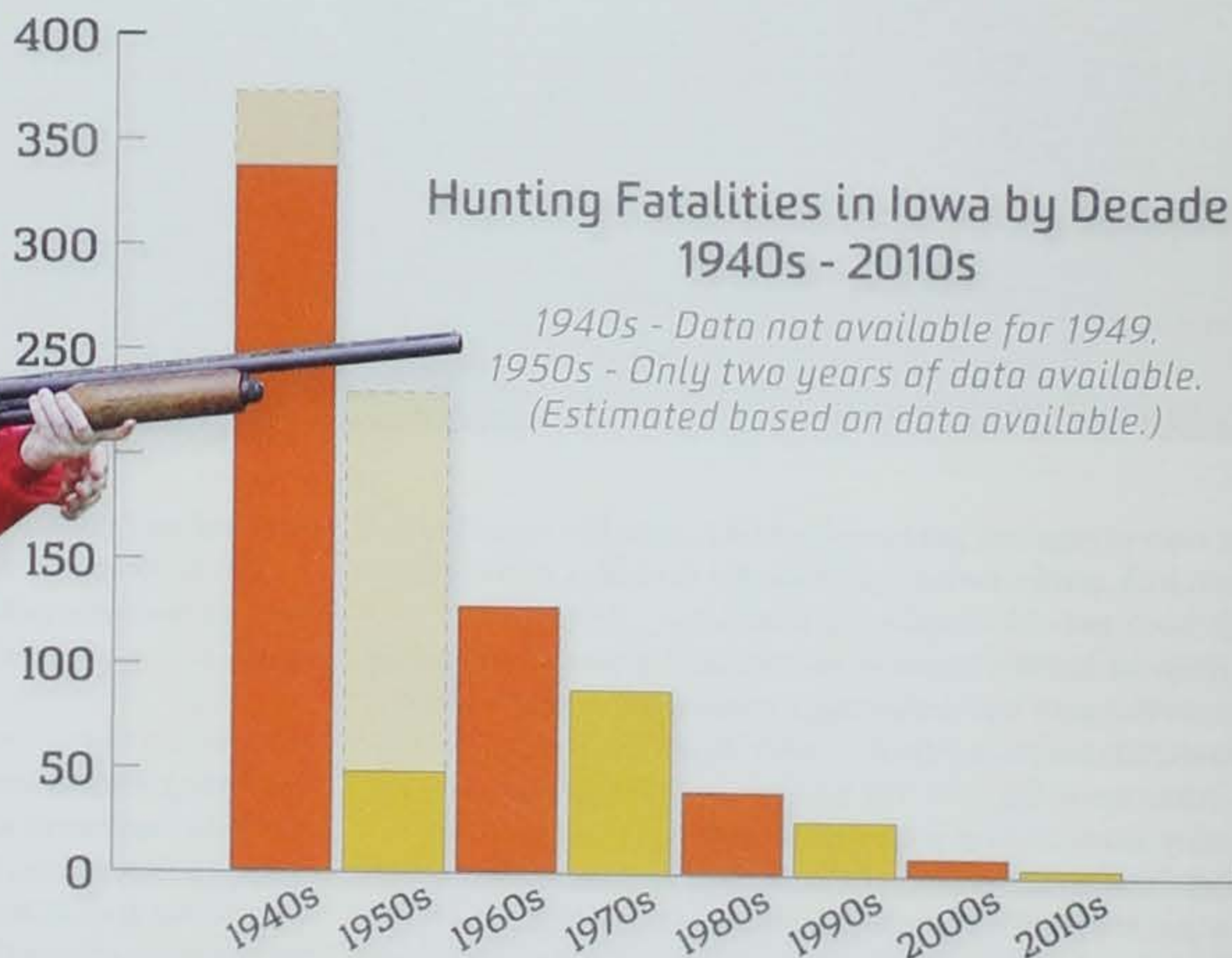
However, other factors could have been at play for

returning WWII veterans. "There are theories as to why fatality levels were so high after WWII," says Wisecup, who notes back then it was mostly small game hunting. "Part of the high fatality numbers relate to the training of service members—trained to shoot at movement...always had finger on trigger. The mentality for military training is to always be ready to shoot. We teach the opposite in hunter education—use the safety, know the target."

Major change occurred again in the mid-2000s with the inclusion of a field day. This was required after students completed the basics online, then received a four-hour field day for in-person training about hunting laws, conservation and ethics, firearm handling and a final exam. A complete online-only option began in July 2013 for those 18 years and older.

Wisecup says there has been a recent increase in the number of non-fatal, self-inflicted hunting accidents this decade by hunters with 10, 15 or 20 years of hunting experience. She says much of this is complacency and a false sense of safety among older, experienced hunters who may be becoming more lax about safety.

"We hear this often in comments from hunter education classes," she says. "The newly certified young hunters are reminding parents and other relatives of basic safety rules," and the older hunters are acknowledging that they have become a little too careless over the years.



Hunt Safely This Year

From the September 1944 Iowa Conservationist

Iowans are assured of the best hunting year for a long time. Rabbit, squirrel and duck seasons are now open and the upland game bird season opens shortly. Some 200,000 licensed shooters will take to the fields to enjoy the sport and excitement of the chase in 1944. Because of their own or someone else's carelessness, some of these hunters will be killed, and some will be crippled. This statement is a cold-blooded fact, and everyone who hunts must use extreme care that he is not one of the actors in an outdoor tragedy. The most important principle of safe gun handling is: "Always point the firearm so that in case of accidental discharge, there is no danger of injury to anyone."



Iowa Natural Beauty on New Quarter

The United States Mint announced in September that Effigy Mounds National Monument will be featured as one of five new designs on the back of 2017-dated coins in the America the Beautiful Quarters Program.

The design depicts an aerial view of mounds in the Marching Bear Group. The new quarter, minted in Denver and Philadelphia, will enter circulation on Feb. 6.

Collectors can order uncirculated, proof or silver bullion editions at usmint.gov or 1-800-USA-MINT.

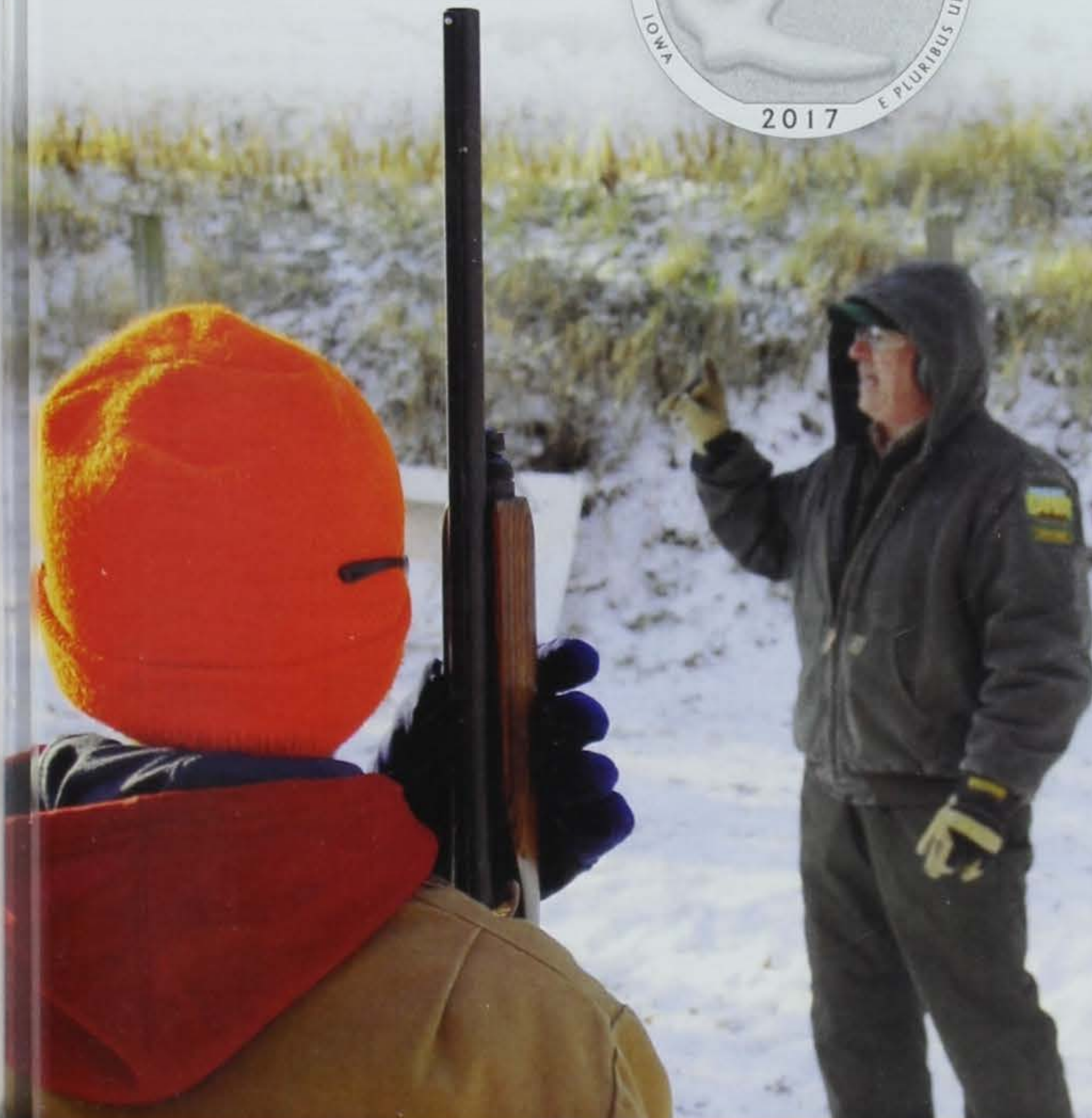


Foreign Guns Dangerous

From the September 1945 Iowa Conservationist

Thousands of G.I.s have brought home foreign firearms. The use of these guns is dangerous. In a recent newsletter, Olin Industries, makers of Winchester shells, pointed out the danger of using American game loads in foreign arms. They comment, "We are tempted to say, 'Boys, you have a swell souvenir. Hang it over the mantle. Maybe it's the best gun in the world, but we have no way of knowing...If you must shoot foreign guns, have them examined by a competent gunsmith. Have his okay that the ammunition is all right and that you are not playing with a booby trap.'"

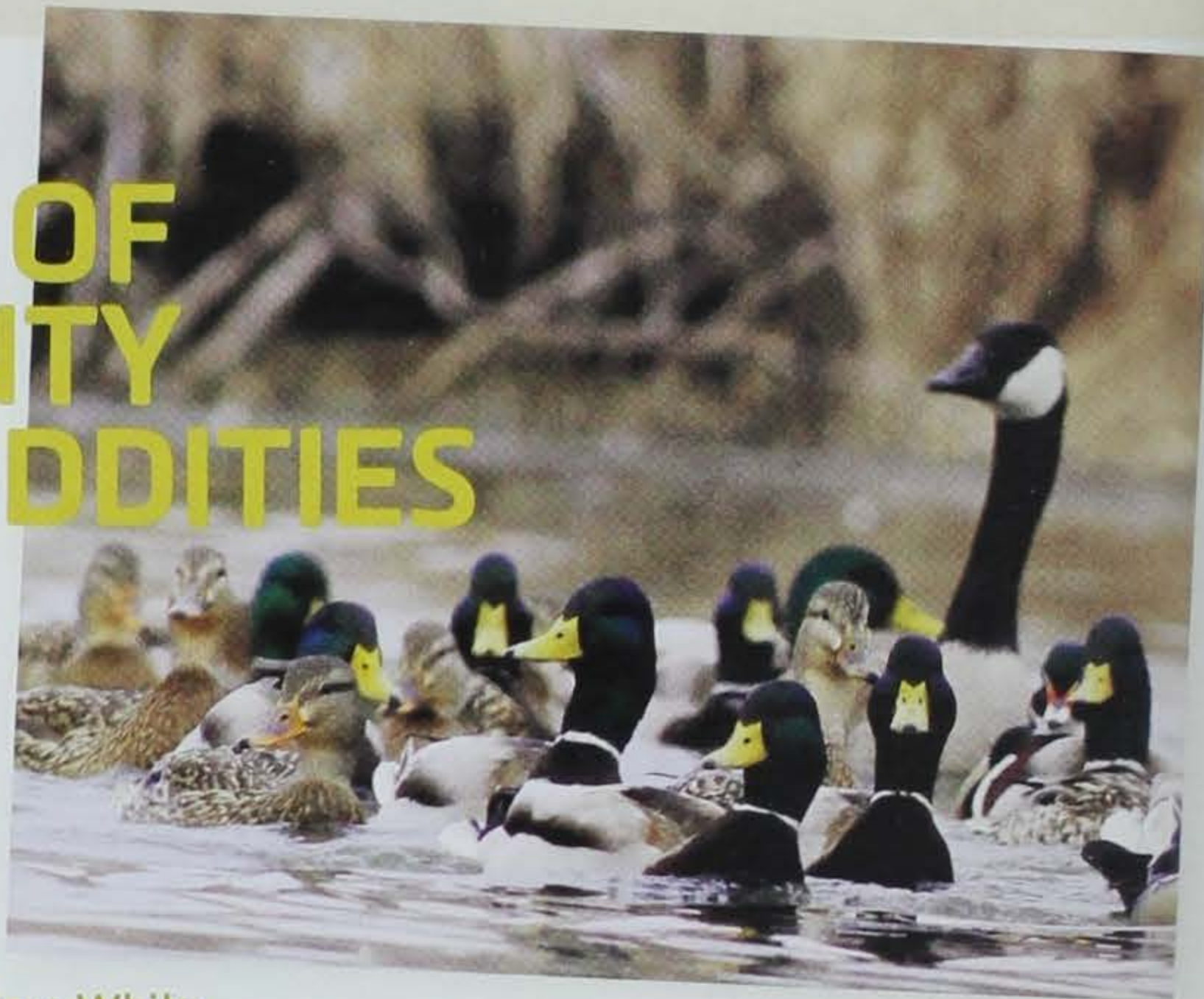
Nearer home, the *Griswold American* reports that during the opening of the pheasant season one man recently returned from overseas with an English gun and was using shells not exactly adapted for the gun. He was trying the shells and one went off. George McConnelee of Griswold was struck in the back and both arms. He is recovering in a Cedar Rapids hospital.



A RETROSPECTIVE ON STORIES FROM DECADES PAST

THE BIGFOOT OF BUTLER COUNTY AND OTHER ODDITIES

One can never tell what might happen outdoors, and hunters and trappers historically seem to always face some interesting and humorous circumstances. Here is a smattering from our archives from 1941-45.



Farmer Ducks

The *Algona Advance* tells of a farmer who let his 200 mallard ducks have the run of a likely-looking slough prior to the opening of the duck season. After he had leased the hunting rights to some hunters and received full payment, the farmer, to the surprise of the hunters, whistled his tame ducks up to the barn, leaving only a few teal on the pond for opening day.

Pheasant Cold Cocks Hunter

Commissioner R. E. Garberson tells of a party of hunters that flushed several birds, fired a salvo of shots, and that a hard-hit bird flying full-speed in a semi-circle crashed square into the back of one hunter's head. Both the bird and hunter were knocked "cold."

Corned Pheasant

A new kink to pheasant hunting was demonstrated near Riceville by Art Nesheim and Walter Hager of Waukon. Art's dog, Duke, gave chase to a rooster pheasant, which became so intent on running out of the county that he rammed his head between two cornstalks, where he was hung up until captured alive by the hunters.

Picking Corn While Plucking Birds

Earl Vosseller was absorbed in thoughts of corn moisture content as he rode his mechanical picker down the rows on his farm near Waverly. A rooster pheasant, flushed by the racket, decided Earl's lap was a likely place to hide. The startled farmer was not too surprised to grab the bird by the neck. The Vossellers had pheasant for supper.

Not to Be Out Foxed

George Huff of Rockwell City, while crawling on his stomach toward a flock of fat cornfield mallards, was disappointed to see another hunter equally intent on nailing a choice duck. As his rival crawled closer, George got miffed and let go a charge of BBs at his chiseling adversary—a red fox who fell dead.



TRACKING THE SASQUATCH OF THE SHELL ROCK RIVER

Recently, an Iowa Outdoors reader contacted us with the following email:

"My name is Randy Hall and I'm from Marshalltown. My father, Darwin, recently passed away and while going through some of Mom's albums I came across an article from the *Waterloo Courier*. I remember Dad telling me the story behind the article.

"Back in January 1954, my father carved a set of wooden bear feet and attached them to a pair of boots. He trapped in Butler County, south of Shell Rock and he started putting down sets of tracks with the wooden "paws" when he went out to run his traps as a joke. Before long he drew more attention than he planned on. He told me someone actually came in with dogs to try and track the bear. He decided he might end up in hot water over the joke so he hid the boots and kept quiet about what he'd done for years. To this day there aren't many people that know the real story. I still have the shoes he made. The wooden paws are still in pretty good shape, but the boots have gotten pretty rotten by now. It would be great to see the story come out after all these years. Thanks for your time."

Well, we couldn't pass this one up.

The short article that appeared in the *Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier* on Jan. 30, 1954 mentions huge tracks found in the frozen snow and ice of the Shell Rock River area. "Dozens of people—the number was estimated as high as 150—visited the creek bed and tracked the huge foot prints, which were more than seven inches long and five inches across..."

Dad "liked to pull practical jokes on people," says Randy. Dad was 28 years old when he set the prank tracks. The carpenter and cabinet



maker hand carved the feet. "My grandparents lived nearby, so they were in on the joke, too," says Randy.

Living near where the fake tracks were made, Darwin could watch people investigating the tracks. "The guy that brought the dogs...his dogs couldn't pick up scent. The guy was getting upset. That's when Dad really decided he should keep quiet about it. The guy with the dogs had come quite a ways to track the "bear."

Darwin passed away two years ago. He had the boots and feet stored in his workshop and several

people, neighbors, asked to see the boots again.

It wasn't his only practical joke. "Once he took a banty rooster and stuck it into the mailbox right before the rural carrier arrived," says Randy.



Winter Fun!

Get Your Outdoor Fix With These Cold-Weather Classics



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Just because winter has set in and the lakes have iced over doesn't mean you have to hang up the fishing spirit. Just switch gear and change tactics.

Many anglers extend their fishing into winter, when most have opted for the shotgun, skis or simply retired to the comforts of home. In fact, some anglers prefer hard-water fishing to open water, and relish the coming of the first safe ice.

Cold weather is the prime argument fair-weather anglers have against ice fishing, but anyone who has sat in an ice shanty with little more than a small propane heater knows the small confines can get quite toasty in a short amount of time. Outside of that, the benefits typically outweigh the drawbacks. The gear, for example, is far less extensive. An ice auger, a couple of cheap ice fishing rods, a small box of ice jigs in various colors and shapes and a tub of waxworms will get you started. Sure, ice shacks can make the experience more comfortable and electronics can help find fish, but opt for a milder winter day, grab a 5-gallon bucket to sit on and follow the crowds.

ICE FISHING is one of the simplest forms of fishing, with minimal tackle and equipment needed to be successful. Following a few simple rules will put more fish on the ice.

- Go small with jigs, bait for all target species, and use light line.
- Looks for transition areas, like a change in depth, substrate and structure.
- Water flowing into a lake or pond is typically warmer and is a prime target area. Be extra cautious as ice may be thinner at that spot.
- Low light or morning and evening are the most productive times to ice fish.
- Minimize noise on the ice. Sounds echo more underwater with ice cover.
- Bluegills are most often found within 6 inches of the bottom. Fish just above them. Crappies can be found anywhere from 2 feet below the ice to two feet off the bottom. The ones higher in the water column tend to be more aggressive.
- For trout, fish as soon after stocking as possible. Target shallower areas immediately after stocking, then fish deeper water and structure as fish become acclimated.

More importantly, hardwater grants access to fish-holding areas not normally accessible during the summer unless blessed with a boat. Whether it be a channel, stake beds, fish mounds or sunken habitat, these are magnets easily accessible only when you have access to the entire lake.

Even better, cold water, and more so ice fishing, opens up possibilities only available if you live in or travel to northeast Iowa. While trout stocking is year around in northeast Iowa, and there are plenty of opportunities for wild strain trout, winter provides a chance for other anglers that ordinarily don't have the chance to pursue these wily fish. Urban trout stockings are planned from mid-October through April in lakes across the state. Some stockings

are planned as a family outing, which may include prizes, bait, use of equipment, refreshments, free fish cleaning and tips from the pros.

Stocking dates and times may change, visit iowadnr.gov/trout for current schedule and additional information or call 515-725-8200 or follow the DNR on Twitter.

URBAN FISH STOCKING

- 1) **BIG LAKE**, Council Bluffs – Pottawattamie County
- 2) **MOORLAND POND**, Fort Dodge – Webster County
- 3) **SCHARNBERG POND**, Spencer – Clay County
- 4) **BACON CREEK**, Sioux City – Woodbury County
- 5) **BLUE PIT**, Mason City – Cerro Gordo County
- 6) **PETOCKA**, Bondurant – Polk County
- 7) **ADA HAYDEN**, Ames – Story County
- 8) **LAKE OF THE HILLS**, Davenport – Scott County
- 9) **OTTUMWA PARK POND**, Ottumwa – Wapello County
- 10) **TERRY TRUEBLOOD LAKE**, Iowa City – Johnson County
- 11) **DISCOVERY PARK**, Muscatine – Muscatine County
- 12) **WILSON LAKE**, Fort Madison – Lee County
- 13) **NORTH PRAIRIE**, Cedar Falls – Black Hawk County
- 14) **BANNER LAKE SOUTH**, Indianola – Warren County
- 15) **PRAIRIE PARK**, Cedar Rapids – Linn County
- 16) **SAND LAKE**, Marshalltown – Marshall County
- 17) **HERITAGE POND**, Dubuque – Dubuque County



Lost In Iowa



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Warm Up Winter On Skinny Skis

Slow Shuffle to A Racer's Skate— Cross Country Skiing is for all

Some bill it as the world's greatest aerobic activity. While they may be right, you can set your pace at a leisurely saunter or a heart-pounding adventure for adrenaline junkies.

"Anyone who can walk can cross-country ski," says Tom Wilton of Polk City, a skiing enthusiast who skis 3.5 miles of groomed trails at nearby Big Creek State Park. "It is a lifetime sport."

Skiers relish getting outside during the winter with an activity that keeps them warm and offers views of the winter landscape, wildlife and solitude, enhanced by sound-dampening snow.

"It can be quite peaceful and there are the health benefits, too. I like the cardiovascular benefits," says Wilton.

Getting started is as easy as borrowing or renting skis, boots and poles. Check with county conservation offices for outings. Beginners start on touring skis,

typically waxless. Avid skiers may have several pairs for specialized uses—touring skis for general use, skate skis for freestyle (a motion that mimics ice skating) and the more standard waxable classic stride skis.

"Start with just trying to walk and stay upright, then try to get some glide going—that's where balance and practice come in. The more time you spend on skis, the more comfortable you get," he says.

Finding a place to ski is easy. Virtually anywhere with snow will suffice. Novices should look for flat terrain in woods, parks and river valleys. You can blaze your own trail in fresh snow, or follow existing tracks.

"I'm hooked on the exhilaration when you glide along on a ski. When gliding, you are not expending as much energy. As your technique gets better you can go farther and faster with less effort. It puts a big smile on your face."

Ski Trail Etiquette

- Hikers, dog walkers and snowmobiles should stay off groomed ski trails and use multiuse trails instead.
- Do not walk or run on groomed ski trails.
- Ski the right direction on one way trails. Keep to the right on two-way trails.
- Leave space between you and other skiers
- Let others know you are approaching and passing from behind by calling out "on your left."
- Do not block ski trails or intersections. When stopped, step to the side out of tracks. If you fall, move off the track as quickly as possible.
- Carry out what you carry in.
- Skate skiers should keep off classic tracks.
- Move off trail to allow grooming equipment to pass.
- If you fall and make a divot on a groomed trail, fill it in with packed snow.
- Downhill skiers have the right-of-way.
- If going out near dusk, wear a headlamp and take basic emergency supplies such as water, a heat reflective blanket and a change of clothes in the car.

Great Skiing at State Parks

BIG CREEK, Polk County, offers 3.5 miles of skate and classic groomed trails with two miles of easy flats and the remainder small hills. **515-984-6473**

PILOT KNOB, Winnebago County, has 2 miles of packed flat trails for skate skiing. **641-581-4835**

GEORGE WYTH, Black Hawk County, offers 4 miles of classic trails and 3 miles for skate skiing, both mostly on the flats. **319-232-5505**

MINES OF SPAIN, Dubuque, has 3 miles of groomed trails. Cedar Ridge Trail is classic and Prairie Ridge Trail has both classic and skate skiing. **563-556-0620**

VOLGA RIVER, Fayette County, forested trails for classic skiing. The 4-mile Lima trail is groomed. **563-425-4161**

YELLOW RIVER FOREST, Allamakee County, the Luster Heights Unit has 4.5 miles groomed for classic skiing in mostly hilly and forested terrain. **563-586-2254**

Find groomed trails (tracks set by machine) statewide at <http://lowaskitrails.blogspot.com/> or skinnySKI.com

Winter Camping Bug Free, No Humidity!

Let's face it—winter camping has some initial challenges, but the rewards are silence, serenity and having big places to yourself. Create active daytimes with hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, then be prepared for winter's long nights with good lighting gear to illuminate camp. Breaking into winter camping isn't hard, but you'll rely on good gear and solid skills. Here's a few basics.

START EASY

Pick a winter night with low wind and moderate temperatures. Use it as a shakedown to gain skills and work out any kinks. Then gradually master colder

conditions as skills build. Novice winter campers should find a nearby park. "Go close in case you have to bail out," offers Marshall Toms, an avid winter camper and manager of Jax Outdoor Gear in Ames.

GET THE RIGHT TENT

Typical summer tents with large mesh windows won't cut it in the winter. A three-season convertible tent has smaller windows and beefy poles to hold snow loads, says Toms. You'll want a roomy tent to store gear, extra clothes and to stand up easily—you'll likely have more tent time in the winter.

Toms advises using a small, easy-to-store backpacker

shovel to clear a place to pitch the tent. With heavy snow and frozen ground, regular tent stakes are useless. Use heavy triangle stakes, snow flukes or heavy nail stakes to penetrate frozen ground. Make a deadman anchor by filling plastic grocery sacks with snow and burying under packed snow. Tie stake-out cords to the anchors.

THE THREE WS FOR WINTER

"There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothes," says winter enthusiast and avid skier Tom Wilton of Polk City. He says to dress in layers to regulate body temperature and moisture. This is vital when skiing, hiking and snowshoeing. Remember the Ws—wicking, warmth and wind/water. A wicking layer, such as polypropylene long underwear, wicks moisture from the skin to prevent clamminess. Next, wear a warmth or insulating layer such as fleece or wool. Top it with a wind and waterproof outer shell of GORE-TEX or other breathable, waterproof fabric. Layering allows complete control over temperature to prevent excessive sweating and subsequent chilling after a workout.

MUMMY UP

Hooded mummy bags hold warm air better than their rectangular counterparts. Good bags have draft protectors along zippers and collars to ward off cold. Increase bag warmth by adding a waterproof, breathable bivy sack (\$100), which adds 10 degrees to any bag. A silk liner (\$40) adds 10-12 degrees. "The silk liner saves you from washing your bag over and over," says Toms.

With bags, there are two ways to go—synthetic or down fill. Down is lightweight and compressible, but loses insulating ability when wet. Synthetic choices include Hollofil, Quallofil and Polarguard. "Polarguard Delta

mimics down for compressibility. PrimaLoft is comparable to the loft of down," he says. (Price range \$180 for synthetic to \$250 for down rated to zero degrees.)

Even a great bag is useless without good protection from the ground. Choose closed cell foam sleeping pads with a high insulating value to prevent heat loss into the frozen ground. Most campers double-up on ground pads to stay toasty.

LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Ward off long, dark nights with good lighting. "A lot of different LED-based lights are getting brighter and better," says Toms. "If sitting around a lot at night, take a Coleman propane lantern" and plenty of fuel for outside use. LED headlamps, lanterns and flashlights work great in the tent. Ensure you have plenty of batteries and keep spares warm in internal pockets. Headlamps are a must for night skiing—at least on moonless nights.

Top 7 Snow Camping Tips

- 1) Do a few jumping jacks before bed to rev up some heat. (But don't get sweaty.)
- 2) Avoid sleeping with your face in the bag. Breath moisture decreases the bag's insulating ability.
- 3) Double up ground pads. Use two, full length closed cell foam pads to insulate you from the frozen ground.
- 4) Keep a whisk broom in the tent to brush off snow from boots and clothes after entering and sweep the snow outside. Use broom to whisk out frozen breath crystals from tent walls and ceiling in the morning.
- 5) Keep toes snug by adding a bottle filled with warm liquid to your sleeping bag near your feet. Make sure the lid is well sealed.
- 6) Pack plenty of extra fuel. Cooking and boiling will use far more fuel in the winter.
- 7) Put your boots in a stuff sack and put them under your bag near your feet or in your bag to keep them from freezing.
- 8) Not all state parks have water available during winter. Check with the park, bring your own water or melt snow.



Start the New Year Outdoors!

State Parks Offer More New Year's Day Hikes Than Ever Before

WAUBONSIE STATE PARK

Surround yourself in the quiet beauty of winter, gather views unimpeded by foliage, meet others passionate about parks and find tracks of animals in the snow. It all happens on "First Day Hikes" held Jan. 1 statewide. Regardless of where you choose to participate, several tips hold true. First, dress warm in layers that can be shed to regulate temperature. Remember warm hats and gloves and sturdy hiking boots. Waterproof boots and gaiters are great in deeper snow. A hiking stick and bottle of water are handy, and cameras or binoculars are recommended. Children are welcome and must be accompanied by an adult. Strollers don't do well in the snow, so very small children may have to be carried. Dogs must be on a leash and are not

allowed into indoor locations where snacks are served, so they may have to spend some time in the car.

Trail conditions and difficulty will vary depending on the amount of snow present.

BRUSHY CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA, Webster County
Meet at 11 a.m. at the Prairie Resource Building, 3175 290th St, Lehigh for a 45 minute woodland hike. For weather cancellations, call **515-576-4258**.

CEDAR ROCK STATE PARK, Buchanan County
Hike moderately hilly terrain winding away from the visitor center to the beautiful Frank Lloyd Wright-

designed Walter Estate grounds. Enjoy nature while hiking near a prairie and riparian forest on the way to the 11-acre site. The Walter house is masterfully placed to view the Wapsipinicon River. After hiking, warm up indoors at the visitor center with cocoa, cider and cookies. Depending on snow conditions, snow shoes will be provided. To hike the 1.5 miles, meet at 1 p.m. at the visitor center, 2611 Quasqueton Diagonal Blvd., Independence.

DOLLIVER STATE PARK, Webster County

Time: 11 a.m.

Meeting Place: 2757 Dolliver Park Ave, Otho

Length of Hike: 45 minutes past bluffs and creeks

Cancellation information: **515-576-4258**

GITCHIE MANITOU, Lyon County

Head to the farthest northwest piece of land in Iowa and you'll be at this preserve named for the creator spirit in Anishinaabe tradition, Gichi-Manidoo (literally "Great Spirit" or "Great Force of Nature"). Hike along the oldest exposed rock in the state, the 1.6 billion-year-old smooth, pink-colored bedrock. The area was once a large village and ceremonial site of ancestors of the Omaha, Iowa, Ponca and Otoe-Missouria tribes. The Big Sioux River, abundant game, fertile soil for gardens and access to stone used for ceremonial pipes made this land attractive. Hike the 1.5 miles by meeting at 1 p.m. at the Gitchie Manitou parking lot, 52141, Adams Ave., Larchwood.

GREEN VALLEY, Union County

The paved trail provides a flat terrain hike along the shoreline of Green Valley Lake, with opportunities to see deer, turkey and bald eagles. Refreshments provided at the park office after the hike. Make the 2-mile hike by meeting at 10 a.m. at the Green Valley Park Office, 1480 130th St., Creston. For weather-related cancellation details, call **641-782-5131**.

HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK, Appanoose County

Join a naturalist-led hike to discover the winter birds of Honey Creek Resort State Park. Some binoculars provided, but you may bring your own. Attend this 1.5-mile hike by meeting at the Activities Building, 12633 Resort Dr., Moravia at 1 p.m. For weather cancellations, call **641-724-1450**.

LACEY-KEOSAUQUA, Van Buren County

Trek along the oak-hickory bluff of the Des Moines River and learn about history, including the river crossing of the Mormon Trail and the many Civilian Conservation Corps structures in the park. Refreshments and a warm fire provided. Hike a mile or two by meeting at 10 a.m. at 22895 Lacey Trail, Keosauqua at the park lodge, near west entrance off County Road J40 or follow signs from the

Highway 1 entrance. For cancellation details, call **319-293-3502**.

LAKE ANITA, Cass County

An easy hike, with views of waterfowl and other wildlife. Coffee, cocoa and snacks afterwards at park office. Meet at the dam parking lot at 9 a.m. (55111 750th St, Anita) for this one mile hike. For weather-related cancellations call **712-762-3564**.

LAKE DARLING STATE PARK, Washington County

Enjoy winter solitude with park staff and the national award-winning Friends of Lake Darling by hiking the new Ding Darling Interpretive Pathway. Hike past the new four-season cabins and keep an eye open for wildlife. Refreshments served after the hike. Meet at 10 a.m. at the park lodge. Choose from two distances to hike, 1.5 miles or 3 miles. Cancellation information: **319-694-2323**

LAKE MACBRIDE, Johnson County

Trek along Lake Macbride's 2.5-mile scenic beach to dam trail and see the spillway, followed by hot cocoa and coffee at the park office. Meet at 1 p.m. at the beach parking lot, 3525 Highway 382 NE, Solon. For cancellations, call **319-624-2200**.

LEDGES STATE PARK, Boone County

Hike the Lost Lake Interpretive Trail with park staff. The trail is located on the south side of the park. No warming house provided. Pets allowed on leash. Meet at 11 a.m. at the Lost Lake trailhead parking lot for this one-mile hike. Park address is 1515 P Ave, Madrid. Cancellation information at **515-432-1852**.

LEWIS AND CLARK, Monona County

Get a healthy start to the New Year with this easy 1.5-mile woodland walk while viewing small mammals and birds. Meet at 9 a.m. at the visitor center at 21914 Park Loop, Onawa. Cancellation Information: **712-423-2829**.

MCINTOSH WOODS, Cerro Gordo County

If conditions allow, bring snowshoes. The hike will wind a mile through the changing woodlands of McIntosh. See recent work of the visiting goat herd along the shore of beautiful Clear Lake. No warming house, but a bonfire will be lit at the end of the hike. Park address is 1200 E Lake St, Ventura. Meet at the yurt cabin parking lot at 1 p.m. Cancellation information: **641-829-3847**.

MAQUOKETA CAVES, Jackson County

Hikers will pass Wye Cave to scenic vistas atop limestone bluffs overlooking Raccoon Creek. Portions of the trail have significant slope with some rough terrain. Pets welcome, if leashed. This one-hour hike is hosted by Friends of Maquoketa Caves. Meet at 1 p.m. at Shelter A.

Lost In Iowa

Park address is 10970 98th St, Maquoketa. Cancellation Information: [563-652-5833](tel:563-652-5833).

MINES OF SPAIN, Dubuque County

Hike America's State Tree Woodland Walk through tallgrass prairie and past the state trees for all 50 states. Soak up a fabulous view at the top of the trail. Coffee, hot chocolate and cookies available after the 1.5 mile hike. Pets must be leashed, but are not allowed in the interpretive center. Meet at 1 p.m. at the EB Lyons Interpretive Center, 8991 Bellevue Heights, Dubuque. Cancellation information: [563-556-0620](tel:563-556-0620) or Friends of Mines of Spain Facebook page or minesofspain.org

PIKES PEAK, Clayton County

Hike 1.5 miles along steep wooded bluffs with sweeping views of the Mississippi River Valley. If conditions allow, there will be an optional hike down to see icicles on Bridal Veil Falls. Hot chocolate, coffee and a fire provided by the Friends of Pikes Peak State Park. Snow shoes optional. Leashed dogs welcome. Gather at 1 p.m. at the Stone Shelter, 32264 Pikes Peak Road, McGregor. Cancellation information: [563-873-2341](tel:563-873-2341).

PINE LAKE, Hardin County

Enjoy a one-mile hike along the Hogsback ridge trail, through the tunnel to the beach and along the shoreline of Lower Pine Lake. Restrooms and warming house not available. The park address is 22620 County Highway S-56, Eldora. Meet at the Cabin/Iowa River boat ramp parking area at 9 a.m. Cancellation information: [641-858-5832](tel:641-858-5832).

PLEASANT CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA, Linn County

Hike a beautiful mile on the Pleasant Ridge Trail, guided by park staff. Hike will include park history and a stop at one of Linn County's oldest historical cemeteries. Snowshoes welcome. Meet at 10 a.m. at 4530 McClintock Road, Palo trail parking lot, second lot on left, west of earthen dam, follow signs. Cancellation information: [319-436-7716](tel:319-436-7716).

PRAIRIE ROSE, Shelby County

Hike a one mile "owl prow" to call in some owls and see if hikers can get a return answer. Pets welcome if leashed. Meet at 5:30 p.m. at the park office at 680 Road M47, Harlan. Cancellation information: [712-773-2701](tel:712-773-2701).

SPRINGBROOK CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER, Guthrie County

Hike two to three miles on a trail through the woods, looking for animal tracks and other signs of wildlife activity. Hike begins with a visit to a small pond, continues past historic Civilian Conservation Corps buildings and stone steps and crosses a bridge over a stream on the

way to Springbrook Lake. Along the wooded trail, look for animal tracks and other signs of wildlife. Children welcome. Meet at 10 a.m. at the conservation education office building, 2473 160th Road Guthrie Center. Cancellation information: [641-431-1455](tel:641-431-1455).

STONE STATE PARK, Woodbury County

Join the Friends of Stone State Park on the Buffalo Run Trail. Visitors may see signs of wildlife, prairie remnants, large oak trees and beautiful winter scenes on a one-mile hike. Hike is appropriate for children approximately 7 years and older. Pets welcome if leashed. Meet at 10:30 a.m. at the parking lot near the park office; 150 yards inside the east entrance from Talbot Road and Memorial Drive. Cancellation information: [712-255-4698](tel:712-255-4698).

WALNUT WOODS, Polk County

Follow flat trails to traverse bottomland timber along the Raccoon River. Hikers may see deer and various winter birds, including bald eagles. Pets must be leashed and are not allowed in the lodge. Gather at 9 a.m. at the Walnut Woods Lodge, 3155 SE Walnut Woods Dr, West Des Moines. Two distances available: an easy mile, or a longer 2.7 mile option. Cancellation information: [515-250-2048](tel:515-250-2048).

WAUBONSIE, Fremont County

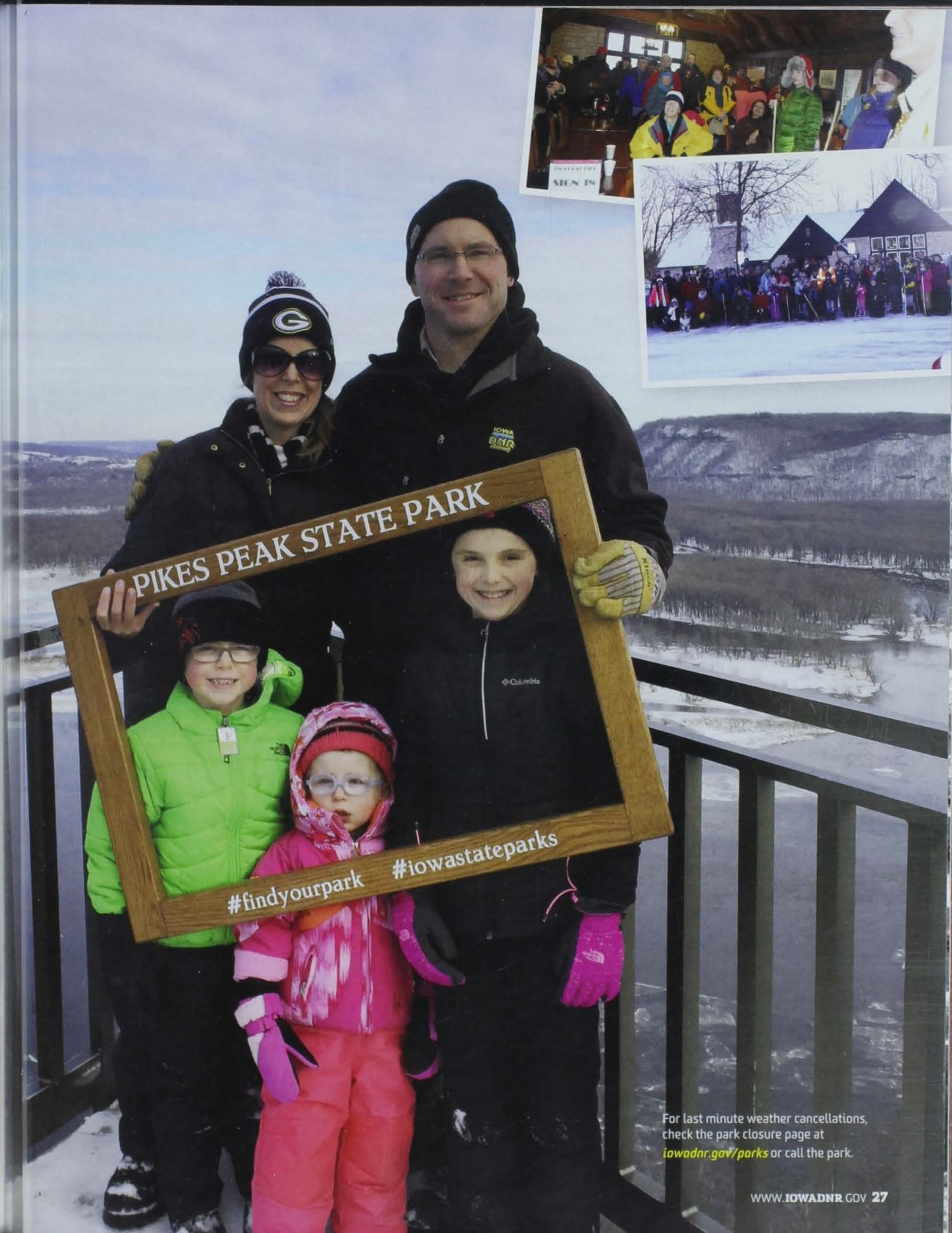
Gather for social time and a pre-hike warm beverage or snack, then embark on a 2-mile backwoods excursion in the undeveloped portion of the former Girl Scout camp. Although not a developed trail, the hike is mostly through open woodland for best wildlife viewing, especially for bird enthusiasts. Hikers will learn more about the park ecosystem and management challenges. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Meet at 1 p.m. at Wa-Shawtee Lodge, 2585 Waubonsie Park Road, Hamburg. Cancellation information: [712-310-3460](tel:712-310-3460).

WILSON ISLAND, Pottawattamie County

The mile hike, along the Chute Trail, will go through cottonwood timber with opportunities to see natural reforestation occurring since the 2011 flood. Heavy snows may move the hike to a loop in the campground. Hot drinks offered after the hike. Pets are welcome but must be on a leash. Meet at 9 a.m. at the park office, 32801 Campground Lane, Missouri Valley. Cancellation information: [712-642-2069](tel:712-642-2069).

YELLOW RIVER STATE FOREST, Allamakee County


Take a 1.5 mile hike through the driftless area of northeast Iowa. Snow shoes provided by the Allamakee County Conservation Board. Local artist Andrew Wroble will display his sculpting talent using nature. Hikers are invited to help with his creation. Meet at 10 a.m. at forest headquarters, 729 State Forest Road, Harpers Ferry. Cancellation information: [563-586-2254](tel:563-586-2254).



PIKES PEAK STATE PARK

#findyourpark #iowastateparks

For last minute weather cancellations, check the park closure page at iowadnr.gov/parks or call the park.



Coyotes vs Wolves

BY MARIAH GRIFFITH AND ALAN FOSTER
COYOTE PHOTOS BY ROGER HILL
WOLF PHOTOS BY TY SMEDES

While Iowa hasn't been a consistent home to wolves for well more than a century, the occasional visitor does wander through. Most often, the travelers are young wolves rejected by their pack. Their stay is typically brief, because while food and habitat may be acceptable, the lack of suitable mates is not.

Striking fear in some and awe in others, their presence—the rare times they are seen—always elicit a response. Wolves, although protected in most states, sometimes fall to the gun, mostly due to misidentification. Iowans enjoy an unrestricted season on coyotes, which are often hunted at greater ranges. And since wolves appear somewhat similar to coyotes, especially at a distance, mistakes can occur. DNA test results on two large canines shot last winter came back as wolves. Although neither hunter was ticketed, conservation officers have the discretion to issue citations. To avoid these mistakes and potential fines, make note of these differences between coyotes and wolves before pulling the trigger.

Wolves vs. Coyotes

Overall Appearance

While coyotes are smaller than wolves overall, they have proportionally larger and pointier ears relative to their heads. Gray wolves' ears are rounded and look more fluffy than a coyote's, as does the rest of the head. A dog's ears can be erect or floppy, and in some cases lack distinctive fur. Wolves and coyotes also tend to have similar colored coats. Gray wolves, as their name implies, often have the gray color phase, but that includes both light and dark shades with some wolves being black or nearly white. Coyotes are also grayish, but they usually have more of a brown or tan tone, particularly on the legs and tail. Lastly, wolves generally look stockier than coyotes, with bigger legs and bodies. A wolf's snout is large, long and blocky while a coyote's is long and pointed. A dog's is typically short and blocky.

Urban Attraction

Coyotes are much more adapted to the presence of people, and more likely to visit urban or suburban areas looking for food. Wolves are skittish, avoid people and stick to quieter forested areas. It is highly unlikely you will come across a wolf in person since they are so rare. It is even less likely to encounter one in a confrontational setting, since there have been no documented cases of wolves threatening the safety of humans in Iowa since the 1800s. Even if you did, they are easily frightened off by loud noises and aggressive motions like hand waving and stomping. Try to avoid all wildlife altercations by being aware of your surroundings in wild areas, making noise and recreating with friends.



Vocal variance

Both wolves and coyotes howl to communicate with other members of their species, but wolf howls are much more consistent in pitch. The howl of a wolf is usually also longer, lower and somber-sounding. If there's a yipping, yelping or excited quality to a howl, or it's high-pitched, it's likely a coyote.



Blast from the past

Although there are a few stories of wolf encounters with humans in Iowa, the four fatal tales occurred in the mid 1800s. Even then, only one story detailed an actual attack. The rest involved wide assumptions. In his book *A Country So Full of Game*, James J. Dinsmore cited some of the more humorous encounters chronicled, including this one from Tama County from the *Palimpsest* detailing the plight of Fiddlin' Jim.

"In 1856, the settlers held a dance to celebrate the completion of their new schoolhouse near Redman. The dance was delayed when the entire orchestra, consisting solely of one Fiddlin' Jim, did not show up. A search party soon found Jim nearby, perched on the roof of an empty shed and playing his violin to six wolves. Jim explained that whenever he stopped playing, the wolves came closer, so he kept playing. Whether this was because they did or did not enjoy his playing is not clear, but Fiddlin' Jim commented that at least he 'sure got tuned up good' for the dance."



Colossal Canines

Wolves are significantly larger than coyotes in every dimension. Coyotes can reach shoulder heights of approximately 20 to 22 inches, whereas gray wolves stand more than a half-foot taller at 27 to 33 inches. Coyotes also top out at a nose-to-tail length of about 4 feet, while gray wolves can reach over 6 feet in length. Adult coyotes typically weigh 30 to 40 pounds, compared to Great Lake Region gray wolves that average more than twice that size. For comparison, a standard male Labrador Retriever weighs 65 to 80 pounds.

Why don't they like me?

While wolves are protected in all but four U.S. states, that hasn't always been the case. Wild canines have been highly persecuted from the beginning, even in Iowa where settlers encountered coyotes and both grey and timber wolves. While wolves largely followed herds of bison and preyed on the young, weak and lame, coyotes preferred smaller prey like rabbits and rodents and the occasional bird. Both, however, apparently took a liking to domestic animals settlers brought with them and raised, like chickens, sheep, pigs and calves, according to Dinsmore's book.

Wolves, and possibly coyotes, were the target of "circle hunts," where as several hundred people would gather, encircle a section of land to be hunted, and close the circle until the animals were pinned in a smaller area where they were killed by dogs or with clubs. Due to the large number of people involved, guns were deemed too dangerous. Coyotes and wolves were also trapped or poisoned.

While coyotes were able to coexist with settlers, wolves weren't so lucky. The first wolf bounty was set in Iowa in 1817, but was repealed the following year due to its high cost. Dinsmore's book and other sources list 1858 as the year the first statewide bounty was established in Iowa. Bounties were \$3 for wolves and half that for coyotes. Bounties reached the peak in 1913, when an adult wolf fetched \$20—equivalent to almost \$500 today. The last wolf shot in Iowa, before last year, was in 1925.

Coyotes and gray wolves both play crucial ecosystem roles and help control prey populations. While wolves are more capable of hunting larger prey, their numbers in Iowa are so low and their presence so infrequent that they wouldn't greatly impact deer populations in the state. Estimates are there are five or fewer wolves in Iowa at any given time. Time will tell if this number trends upwards or not. Still, the next time you see an Iowa canine you might want to look a little closer—you could be witnessing the return of a majestic Iowa predator.

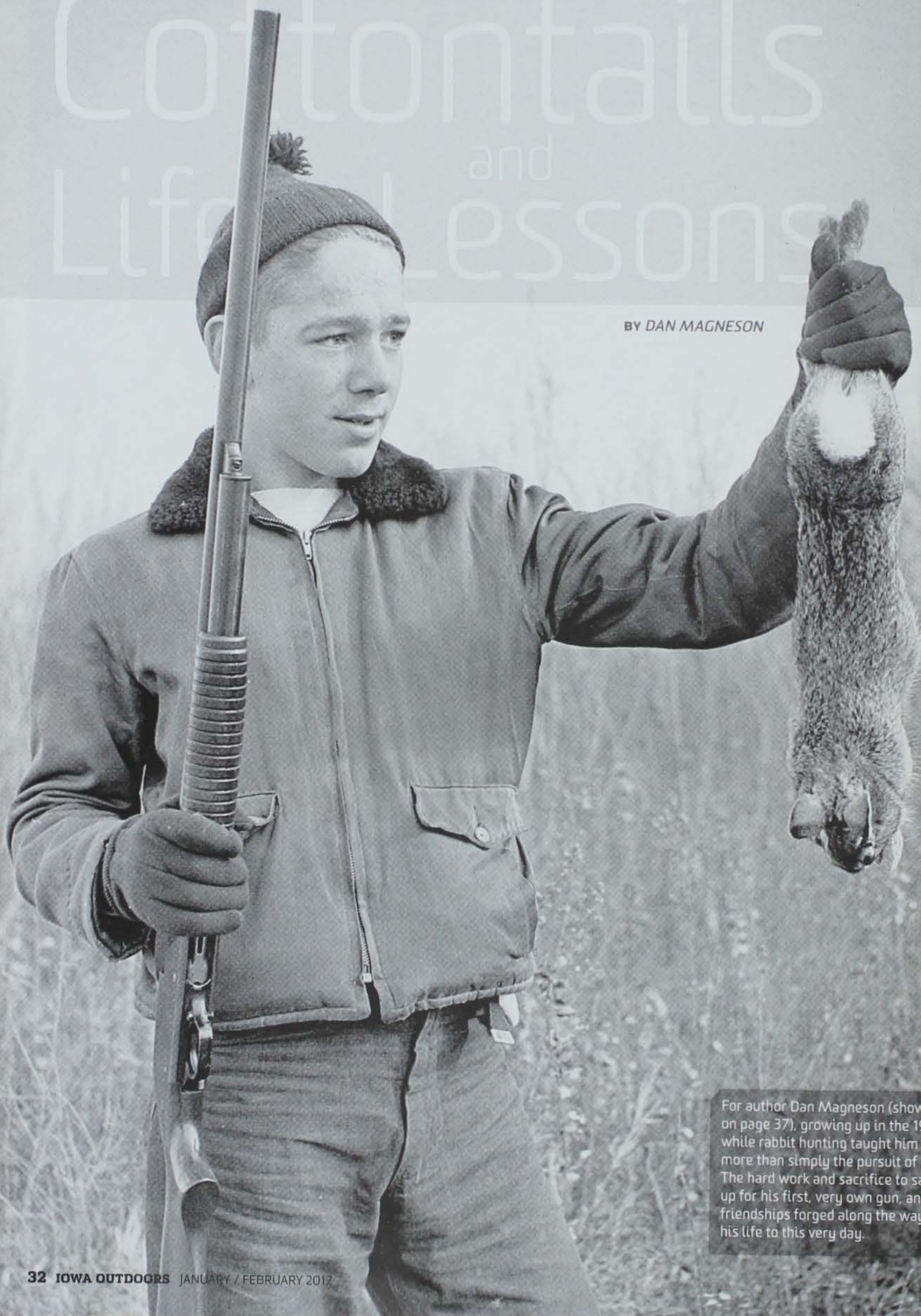
Tracking

If you come across tracks during the hunt, they can tell you even more. Coyote tracks are usually 2.5 inches in length, and gray wolf's are up to 5 inches long. Dog tracks are anywhere in between, depending on the breed and the size. It's important to remember wolves are rare in Iowa, and some large dog breeds leave tracks as big or bigger than those of wolves, so a large canine track is likely more indicative of a neighbor's pet than a wolf. Coyotes and wolves generally walk or trot in a direct line, with the hind feet stepping in line with the front feet. Dogs out for a romp leave varied trails as they investigate the new sights and sounds, and tracks show signs of frequent leaps and bounds. Their hind foot placement varies from step to step and may fall on top of the front foot track or to either side. Dog tracks are wider and flatter to the ground, and the heel pads register more strongly in both the front and rear tracks. 🐾



Cottontails and Life Lessons

BY DAN MAGNESON



For author Dan Magnuson (shown on page 37), growing up in the 1970s while rabbit hunting taught him far more than simply the pursuit of game. The hard work and sacrifice to save up for his first, very own gun, and the friendships forged along the way, guide his life to this very day.

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years of research and testing were required to create this distinctive all-new RUGER. Our reputation for quality firearms is involved with any new RUGER. We believe the Model 10/22, and the major advance in rifle design which it represents, will make it the first choice of the experienced shooter and the connoisseur of fine firearms.

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AT YOUR REQUEST COMPLETE LITERATURE ON THE NEW 10/22 AND ALL OTHER RUGER FIREARMS.

When I first started hunting in the early 1970s, it was for cottontail rabbits and gray and fox squirrels—they were what most of us up-and-coming Iowa youth cut our teeth on.

I started out with a hand-me-down .22 single-shot rifle. It had a big knurled knob at the rear of the bolt assembly that you pulled backward to cock the action. It was a nice gun to shoot, and was quite accurate too.

But I dreamed of buying my very own rifle, and one capable of firing multiple shots instead of having to stop and reload after every one. I pored through various catalogs of rimfire offerings of the day, by no means an easy task.

It was a different world when it came to firearms back then. A myriad of various guns were manufactured not only by major gunmakers, but also on behalf of many chain stores so common in small Iowa downtowns. And these establishments used their own respective “store” or “house”

brands. Among others, Gambles had their “Hiawatha” line and Western Auto had their “Revelation” line.

Not to be outdone, the three big catalog stores of the era each carried their own line of guns too. J.C. Penney had “Foremost,” Montgomery Ward had “Western Field” and Sears had “Ted Williams.”

And it wasn’t uncommon for them to have their respective labels on ammunition to boot, and you saw a lot more .22 shorts and .22 longs on the shelves then. These offerings weren’t nearly so eclipsed by the .22 long rifle cartridge of today.

After pondering the choices through those eventually well-thumbed pages, I finally settled on what I wanted—a little Ruger 10/22 carbine seemed a good choice since I was small for my age, and to go with it, I chose a Weaver telescopic sight, a shoulder sling, a plush and well-padded gun case and a small-bore rifle cleaning kit.

Choosing what to buy was the easier work. Actually

buying these things meant real work. Dreaming had to turn into doing if I wanted to hunt with my own gun next autumn.

So like a lot of Iowa kids, I spent the summer detasseling corn, ridding soybean fields of weeds and helping put up hay.

It wasn't any pile of peaches performing this work, as each had something in common: oppressive heat and humidity and sweat-soaked and dirty, stained clothing that soggly clung and stuck to your skin.

Each task had its unique brand of suffering to endure if you wanted your full pay: the blackened inside of your nostrils, the itching down the center of your back and the riled-up wasps made putting up hay seem worst—until you remembered the mosquitoes in the corn and bean fields or the added misery that occurred when you finally exited the field, only to discover your chosen path led you right smack-dab through a patch of stinging nettles.

A farmer who lived nearby had me cut and haul away honey locust saplings that were beginning to invade his pastures. For those not familiar with this species, they have fine and pretty lacey-delicate foliage amidst beyond-belief thick phalanxes of sadistically-long and sinisterly-sharp spines. It is as though the benevolent Dr. Jekyll and malevolent Mr. Hyde are simultaneously expressing both personalities while also taking on the form of a tree, and you would need a knight's shining armor to ever climb one of them.

The mature locust trees, overall about the size of a mature apple tree, produced large seed pods that held a sweetened, honey-like pulp within, and good numbers of pods always seemed to be scattered around on the ground. Undoubtedly his cattle had eaten them for their tasty pulp and then pooped out the seeds in their own little personal bed of fertilizer all about the pasture.

With heavy gloves and ginger care, I cut them down or pulled them out, and then hauled them to different spots alongside various gullies and piled them up.

After a summer of toil, a real threat to the integrity of my savings emerged in the form of the Iowa State Fair.

I had completed that honey locust removal job, and got paid on a Friday. After having pedaled my bike all the way back into town, the bank had already closed, where my pay otherwise could have joined that which I had previously accumulated.

Early Saturday morning, our family headed to Des Moines for the fair and that money was in my wallet.

It was my first lesson in the concept

of delayed gratification. Impulsive bursts and bouts of fun were all around me, from the dizzyingly-high and furiously-fast rides to the carnival midway and their cat-calling proprietors. I simply gritted my teeth and kept reminding myself that such fun was fleeting with no long-lasting value.

Especially enticing was a trailer offering chances to shoot a fully-automatic BB gun, a replica fashioned after a drum-fed Thompson submachine gun. A hose similar to that with which you filled air into your tires at the gas station supplied compressed air into this BB gun, enabling either bursts or a constant stream of fired BB's while aiming at a red star printed on a small and thin piece of white cardboard. To win a prize, you had to completely obliterate all of the red coloring of the star.

Not willing to part with any of my money the entire weekend made it a torturous time, but early that subsequent autumn, when I finally beheld the blued steel and glossily-rich hue and warmth of the hardwood stock of my brand-new Ruger with my own hands, it all seemed very worthwhile.

I even had enough money left over to buy a few boxes of .22 long rifle cartridges from Remington's "Mohawk" line, all in a single purchase rather than piecemeal. I recall Gibson's Discount Center advertised them in the local newspaper for just 49 cents a box!

I distinctly remember this because it equated so very nearly to only a penny per shot. More vaguely, I recall these cartridges came in a little brown cardboard box with a bold yellow arrow emblazoned on the top.

After the other small game seasons had closed, Iowa was always generous in prolonging your hunting season by giving you the entire month of February to hunt

cottontails, plus a generous bag limit on top of that.

We lived very close to the edge of town, and as we progressed through February in southernmost Iowa, winter was getting a little long in the tooth with every passing day. Daylight increased enough that going hunting after school was now realistic.

So as soon as I got home, I put on heavy calf-length hunting socks, grabbed my hunting vest and that Ruger carbine and headed off into the countryside. I'd stick a blue Camillus Cub Scout knife into my pocket and encased a full pair of those greenish-tinted Dr. Pepper bottles into each of a spare pair of socks within the vest's game bag situated at the lower back.

Socks kept the bottles from clanking together and scaring away game. My hunting partners tended to view this



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Rabbit hunting was still very popular in the 1970s, with many years topping over 1 million cottontails harvested. Last year, Iowa hunters took about 113,000 rabbits. The rabbit population remains high for those wanting to pursue this once-popular game.

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Socks kept the bottles from clanking together and scaring away game. My hunting partners tended to view this

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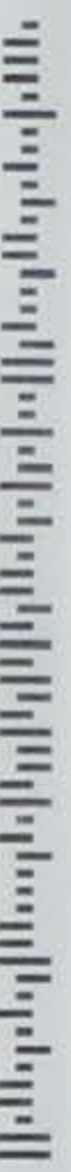
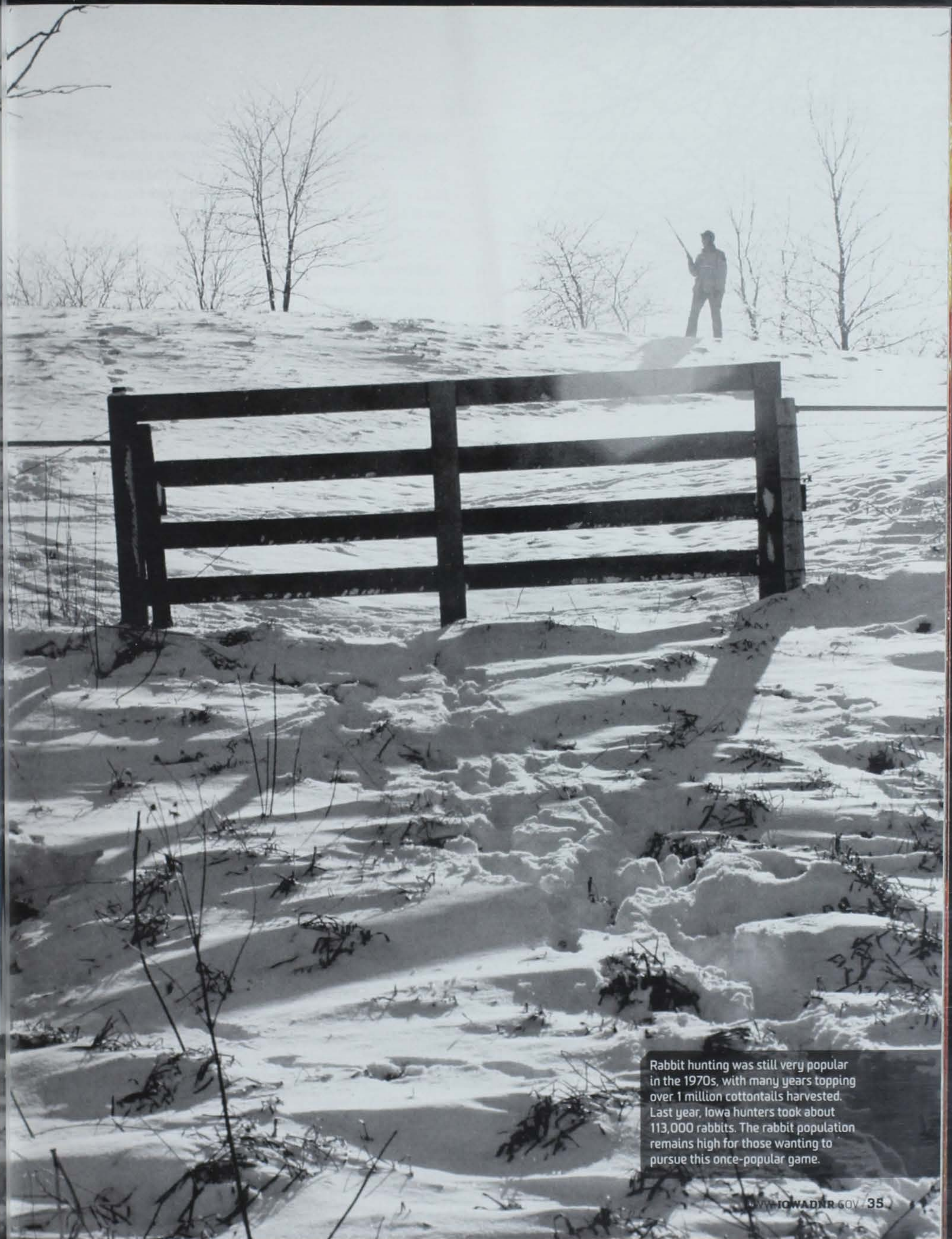


Photo: Iowa Department of Natural Resources



Rabbit hunting was still very popular in the 1970s, with many years topping over 1 million cottontails harvested. Last year, Iowa hunters took about 113,000 rabbits. The rabbit population remains high for those wanting to pursue this once-popular game.



extra pair of dry hunting socks as a luxury, but I looked at them as a necessity, stopping and changing socks about midway through the hunt. Anyway, by then, the pop bottles had long been emptied and went into the socks I'd changed out of so that I didn't litter and also so that I could later return them for the 10 cent bottle deposit.

Warm gloves weren't as readily available then as now. (Ordering synthetic materials online have improved our lot immensely in this regard.) Stiff styles of gloves wouldn't do, brown jersey gloves didn't provide enough insulation from the cold, and wool gloves were indeed warm, but fiercely attracted the maddeningly entangling



Carbine

noticeable in the 10/22 Carbine stock precision machined from a solid block American Walnut. Accurate, Reliable, Rugged, Fast Handling, Light, Compact and priced to be an Exceptional Value . . . the Ruger 10/22 Carbine is a unique pleasure to own.

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Best quality open sights as used on high power rifles. The rear sight is adjustable for elevation and windage and includes an optional permit use of a low mounted scope.

36 IOWA OUTDOORS JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2007
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It was a different world when it came to firearms back then. Myriads of various guns were manufactured not only by major gunmakers, but also on behalf of many chain stores so common in small Iowa downtowns. And these establishments used their own respective "store" or "house" brands.

seeds of burdock, devil's stick-tights and sock-destroyer.

Mittens were warmest, but cumbersome, lacking the dexterity needed to operate a rifle when trying to bag a fast-fleeing cottontail.

My rabbit hunting route was mainly along a heavily-timbered and ultimately forking creek. I think rabbits concentrated there in the frozen winter not just for shelter in heavier cover, but also for nourishment nibbled from various species of woody seedlings and saplings that grew thick. There were always lots of cottontails in those creek bottoms.

Overlooking the creek for a good length of my hunt were drier upland pastures from where I'd cleared the honey locust. Some were dotted with little groves of juniper, and there wasn't very much in the way of row crops. I used to make side trips up those steep slopes to a pond whose banks were choked with willow. It was there one spring day that I'd parted a curtain of willow and witnessed the gaudy, jaw-dropping beauty of a surprised drake wood duck—the first I'd ever seen.

A buddy and I used to fish it too, and once we'd ridden our bikes out there to do just that. Under a high and hot summer sun we discovered beavers had moved in and gnawed them all down. Despite the lack of shade from the willows, we stayed and fished anyway, and that bike ride back to town was the hottest and thirstiest experience of my entire life. We stopped at a local gas station at the edge of town and each guzzled about a six-pack's worth of bottled Coca-Cola dispensed from a machine.

But there was a silver lining, because the trees the beavers dropped along the banks were now a haven for February cottontails, and the willows that had landed in the water would next month be heaven for the March crappies that occurred in such numbers our stringers would strain and sag.

As for the honey locust I'd cut and piled along the gullies, their dead and now-dried wood persisted in cruel and medieval-looking mounds. When hunting in pairs, one partner would climb onto the bigger brush piles and bounce up and down trampoline-style while the other stood with his gun at the ready should a rabbit flush.

But I'd inadvertently created a cottontail's Fort Knox, and no way a guy with even the slightest grain of common sense was going to climb upon a brush pile with honey locust in it, for fear of falling down into it should the supporting limbs shift out from under you. That respect extended to restraint from even kicking brush piles of honey locust, usually a productive method when hunting

solo, but when it came to honey locust, a spine could puncture your boot and pierce your foot.

An elderly farm couple lived near the stop-and-turn-around point of my hunting forays along those creek bottoms, and they relished rabbit meat. But he was too stiffened and stoved-up with arthritis to flounder through snowdrifts and flail through brush anymore, or grab onto the exposed tree roots and pull himself back up those steep creek banks after bagging a rabbit.

They had a spacious, enclosed porch where he laid rabbits in a line for dressing them out, and then we'd go into the house to visit and I could warm up before turning around and heading home before dark.

That porch kept the cats outside, where they couldn't drag off any rabbits, and from a 2017 perspective that porch seemed like a sort of time capsule, though it was unremarkable in that era: there was a horizontally-positioned metal blade embedded into the concrete just outside the porch door to scrape sticky Iowa mud off your boots, and next to it a contraption with coarse brushes secured within and facing inward on the sides to remove even more mud.

Inside, next to a big bag of dog kibble, was a slab of wood with a "V" cut at one elevated end, which would catch and hold the heel and help to pull your boots easily off without your having to stoop over and strain so uncomfortably.

From various nails protruding from the walls hung an eclectic smorgasbord of goods and gear: a frayed and threadbare bag bulging with clothespins; an assortment of rusty traps; a "come-along;" a well-worn corn knife with



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Author Dan Magheson in the 1970s

a broad band of slick and shiny vinyl electrical tape wound around the wooden handle; a Flexible Flyer sled with an upside-down arch of rope dangling from it, rope similar in appearance to that used to pull-start your lawn mower's engine; jumper cables and a big galvanized washtub.

In a nearby corner were some greasy and grungy-looking boards their grandson had used to stretch muskrat pelts, and a pair of rubber hip boots hung off to one side above them, next to an old wooden ladder spattered by a rainbow of different colors.

In the opposite corner was one of those old washing machines that had a big wringer and heavy crank apparatus on top, and tucked underneath was one of those old white enamelware pans, the kind that have that red ring around the rim and that, when chipped, reveal a sort of scalloped and concentrically-ringed black coating beneath.

The first time I dropped off rabbits they insisted I take a dollar each for them despite my protests that this was wholly unnecessary. As I was leaving and seeing an opening when their heads were turned, I put each of those dollar bills under each of those rabbits. They later bumped into my mom at Hy-Vee while shopping and related what I'd done. Mom didn't say it, but I think she was glad I did such a favor for that elderly farm couple without accepting any gratuity.

Near the farm I admired the great girth and towering height of the apparently-ancient cottonwoods that grew along those creek bottoms, trees the wife derisively dismissed as "lightning prongs." For my part, I complained about having to fish the diminutive .22 cartridges out of their little box and then trying to feed them into the Ruger's rotary clip with clumsy, cold-numbered and fumbling fingers while simultaneously standing in snow. Dropping the little shells during this reloading process would have almost certainly translated into losing them.

These were the only words ever uttered that veered even slightly toward the negative. Without exception our visits were always warm, jovial and cordial despite our huge generational differences in age.

I remember once getting a late start on the return trip home. It got dark along the way, but a full moon came up and transformed the snowy landscape into a magical, mystical sort of wintry setting. The sight of the lights of town laying ahead were neat, alternating from clear to hazy between my foggy and frozen exhalations, and the resonant five-note call of a great horned owl from way off somewhere behind me was neat too. But as always, I found those hoots a little unearthly and unnerving too, especially when coming as they did from behind me.

Then came an evening in late February when we visited too long and it was already dark when I stepped out of their porch. A moonless sky was overhead. It was going to be a pitch-black night.

The husband was a pretty tall man, and he cast a long

shadow as he walked out past the rather-distant yard light to the garage to fetch his old Ford Galaxie.

At his behest, we would make a stop in downtown Clarinda. It must have been a Thursday evening, because stores around the square were still open and people were out walking the sidewalks—as was usually the case on Thursday nights when I was still in my early teens.

I left my hunting vest on the back seat, but we locked my carbine out of sight in the car's trunk.

We parked in front of a little café, and as always, I was ravenously hungry. At the time I really had a thing for hash brown potatoes with ketchup, and it didn't much register with me when he said he'd "be back in a little bit," because first he needed to run an errand "over to the Coast-to-Coast store." My mind was already held hostage by the thought of tasty and toasty hash browns.

I was served a cup of hot chocolate from one of those restaurant machines that whir so loudly while dispensing it, and pretty soon he walked in and joined me with a cup of coffee.

We visited, and before too much longer we could see the empty bottoms of our cups.

"Well," he paused, sitting there in his overalls—and then quickly going on to reference his wife: "Do you think she's about all finished up with them rabbits by now?"

He winked, and we both chuckled before he said, "We'd probably better get going."

After he let me off at my house, I went indoors and went to retrieve my dirty socks and empty pop bottles from the game bag of my vest.


I felt something unfamiliar, and withdrew my hand to find a brand-new Jon-e brand hand warmer, still in its store packaging and with a gummy square spot where the price tag had been peeled off.

He'd remembered my tale of woe about reloading that clip with cold fingers, and he'd bought me this gift with which to alleviate that problem. Now the true purpose of his excusing himself to run that errand was crystal-clear.

All of this took place well over 40 years ago, and by the time it dawned on me just how kind and generous these farmers really had been to me, the sun had long since set on them for the last time and there is no way to go back and reiterate and really emphasize my thanks. Like so many things in life that seemed routine and ordinary when they occurred, you don't realize how special those times really were until you look back on those days many decades later.

But having once been my age themselves, I think they each knew in their hearts how much I was learning along the way—and how much fun I was really having all the while.

Today, when I hold in my hands that little Ruger carbine I slaved and saved for those decades ago, it is with a certain nostalgic reverence. It's a special treasure from the days of my youth—just like that vintage hand warmer that I keep right alongside it. 🐾



In 1963, more than 2 million cottontails were harvested. A few years later in 1970, the number of rabbit hunters was just shy of 170,000. Last year, only an estimated 25,000 hunters pursued rabbits. This year, consider prolonging your hunting year by taking up rabbit hunting. The season lasts until Feb. 28.

22 LONG RIFLE

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22 LONG RIFLE

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MOHAWK

HIGH VELOCITY

LAW OF TOOTH AND FANG

At first glance, the February forest appears as void and uninhabited as the dark side of the moon. At this season, there is no din of bird music to greet the rising sun. And as you stroll across the white expanse of this frozen world, you almost get the feeling this particular portion of Iowa is as remote and isolated as the Canadian wilderness.

But first impressions can be deceiving, and a closer inspection shows the forest floor crisscrossed by myriad animal tracks left by the furred and feathered creatures that call this place home. It is here in the clean snow that human explorers can find nature's version of Facebook. The snow features stories about social gatherings, social strife and tragedy. It tells where the turkey roosts, which grass seed buffets are currently most popular with the local rodent population and where the rabbit lives in a pile of sticks.

However, beyond the quick insights, animal tracks also allow observers to glimpse into a world that civilized people have largely forgotten. It is the harsh reality of predator and prey, a realm where the world is neatly divided into two categories. One is the hunter, the other hunted. And in this high-stakes game of survival there are no politics, no trade-offs, no compromises—simply a winner and a loser.

The balance between predator and prey is amazingly fragile, and in spite of intense human disturbance, the basic components still exist. Prey species, such as mice, rabbits and voles, have a tremendous capacity for reproduction—they must to survive as a species. Predators, such as the fox, do not. To follow the tracks will reveal episodes of chases, near misses and often a widening pink spot in the snow where one life has ended so that its stored energy is transferred to allow another life to continue. This relationship is the essence of the natural rhythm of life. It is the transfer of life giving energy through the web of life.

The latest set of tracks offer a good example of how basic this principle of tooth and fang works. Near the forest edge, a hungry rabbit ventures out into the open to girdle the bark from a clump of sumac—a risky move not undetected by a nearby hawk. The northern goshawk banks and, sensing its mistake, the winter-lean rabbit flees for cover, stretching out in 2-foot bounds. The hawk closes and the cottontail begins a series of evasive dodges that buys a few more seconds of life. But at last the two forms converge and the chase is over.

A rabbit dies.

A hawk feeds.

And the cycle continues. 🐾



The northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) is the largest, most aggressive of three species of woodland raptors (*accipiters*) found in Iowa. It is far larger than the sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawk. And unlike those two smaller hawks, the goshawk is less likely to be found in urban and suburban areas, preferring large tracts of forest.



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Cold Weather Paddling

Bringing In the New Year on the Water

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIP LADAGE

Winter—a season filled with many outdoor activities. Who doesn't enjoy ice fishing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or ice skating?

There are plenty of cold-season activities for the outdoor-minded person to do. But what if you covet warm weather activities year round? Is it possible...can it be done...does it make sense? Certainly.

Sometime soon after the last of the leaves have been raked and the snowblower is ready for another season, most folks put their paddling equipment away to gather

dust for several months. Only a few consider the winter months suitable for wetting a paddle, but times are changing. Improvements in equipment, advancements in clothing and a change in opinions toward winter activities mean more people are active through the winter months, with many participating in modified versions of summer activities. I personally can attest to the fun of typical summer activities during the cold winter months. I paddle and ride my bicycle every month of the year. Adaptation has been the key, but it works and I have fun doing both.

Winter Paddling

I have always been an avid paddler. Years ago my passion for paddling began with a heavy, but trusty, aluminum canoe. The number of hours spent in that canoe or the many miles paddled are unknown, but I have had that Michicraft canoe on the water often. I'd still be paddling the noisy, shiny canoe if I hadn't been introduced to a different style of vessel—the kayak. (For the record, I still have that canoe and it continues to provide a stable ride.)

After a few years of paddling the aluminum canoe, I began exploring the local rivers, marshes and lakes from the comfort of a kayak. I bought my first kayak without a test paddle and I have never looked back. In fact, most of my paddling is now in one of my kayaks. Kayaks are stable, fast and maneuverable. As a nature photographer, many of my most popular images were created from the seat of my kayak. I haven't given up entirely on canoes, but the stability of a kayak is critical for cold weather paddling.

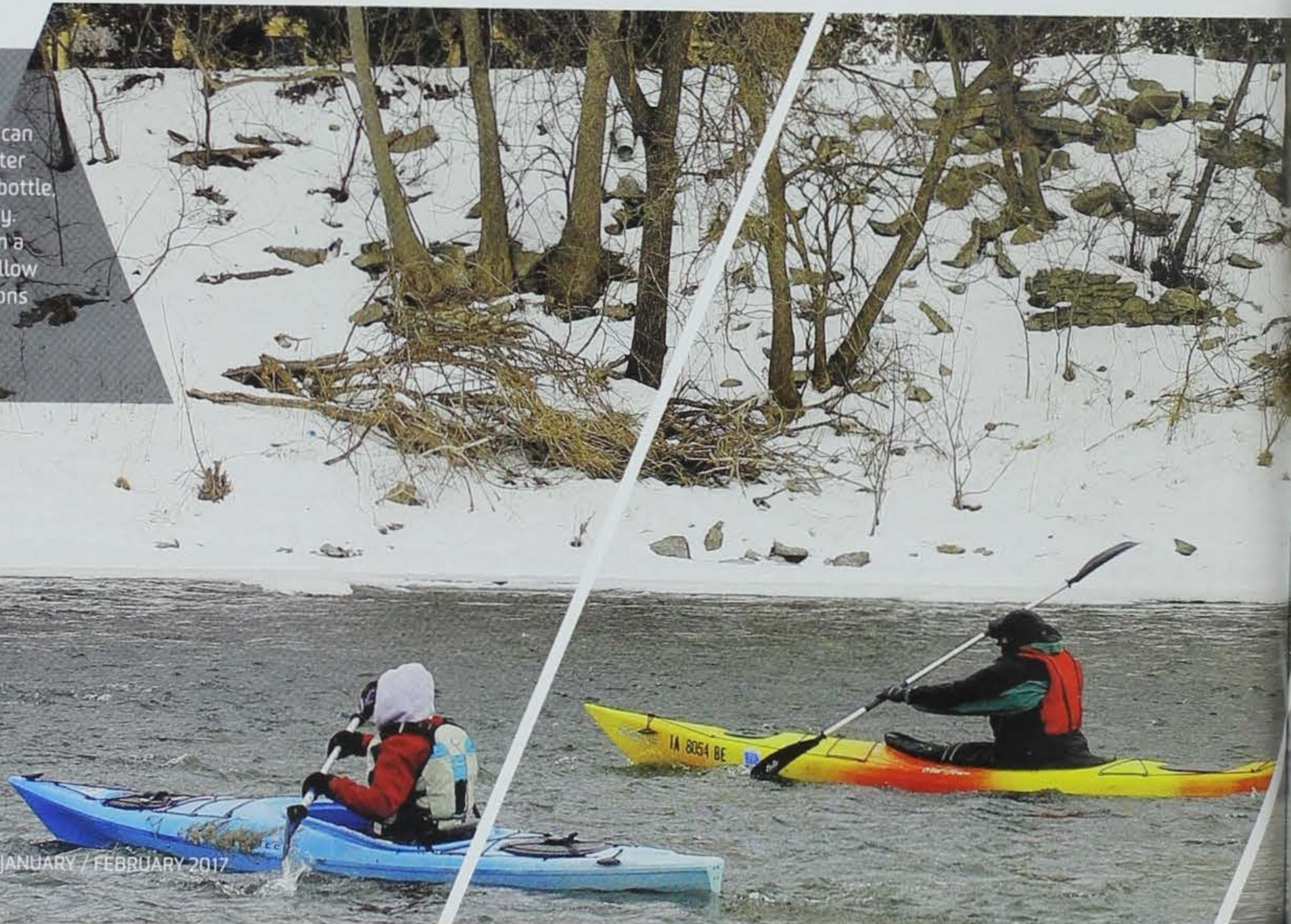
Back in the early '90s I first struggled with the end-of-season paddling. I hated flipping my canoe over to store when the weather turned cool. Brisk conditions or not, I often ventured on the water late in the season or until my favorite paddling destination (Sweet Marsh near Tripoli in Bremer County) was covered in ice. Sure, I had to wear more clothing and be more cautious, but the

desire to paddle was strong enough to make the efforts worthwhile. Then in 1992, my buddy, who was also going through the same cold-weather end-of-paddling season withdrawals, and I came up with a plan. "Let's celebrate the New Year's Day holiday with a paddling adventure!" Conditions weren't perfect, but we had enough open water that the two of us navigated my canoe along the icy shorelines and down the Wapsipinicon River.

Winter paddling was a distinctly different experience compared to warm-weather paddling. Great blue herons and kingfishers were long gone, replaced by winter scenery and quiet solitude. We had the river to ourselves, the air was crisp and fresh, the activity was invigorating—New Year's Day paddling was a great experience, and the seed was planted. Now here we are, 25 years later, and we are still beginning each new year with our paddles in the water. The difference from our initial winter outing to the present time—we are now joined by other paddlers who also venture into the cold weather for a brisk holiday experience.

Depending on conditions, we sometimes have an easy time of our holiday paddling. Usually the event requires a bit of ingenuity and adaptability. More than once I have had to wear chest waders and break ice to access water. Several times the distance range of our paddling has been less than one-quarter mile, but that was fine. We are satisfied to paddle up and back several times, just

While it may be cold outside, dehydration can also factor into a winter paddle. Pack a water bottle and a snack for energy. It's a good idea to plan a winter float with a fellow paddler since conditions are more extreme.



to be on the water. Even with challenges, the rewards have been many. We almost always paddle in the midst of wintering bald eagles. We have paddled in winter fog, near blizzard conditions, noisy ice-shelf waters, blustery windy days and mild winter afternoons. We have introduced as many as 40 other hardy souls to the holiday pastime. Probably most rewarding is our paddling season never really ends. No doubt the frequency of paddling decreases, but we never stop completely.

Even though the weather turns cold, it is still possible to get on the water. You just need a bit of determination and plenty of preparation.

Winter Paddling Considerations

To some, winter paddling may not appear to be much different than warm weather paddling. Paddlers use the same equipment and generally travel familiar routes. But, there are serious safety considerations to address before dipping your paddle in colder water.

HYPOTHERMIA - Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can be generated. Obviously, a capsize will result in substantially higher risk of hypothermia. Even if you remain on top of the water in your kayak, hypothermia is possible. Cold temperatures and winter winds draw body heat quickly. While you may feel warm when you begin your outing, you soon may feel

a chill. Dress for the conditions in layers of appropriate clothing. Get off the water as soon as possible when you get cold.

Watch for unintentional exposure to water that is ignored during the summer, but in the winter can cause serious concern. Splashing from paddles or drip rings that are missing from your paddle or incorrectly adjusted can result in a cold, wet paddler in a matter of minutes. When paddling in cold weather, every detail matters, so pay attention to your equipment and technique. Consider a spray skirt for extra protection. Stay dry to help stay warm.

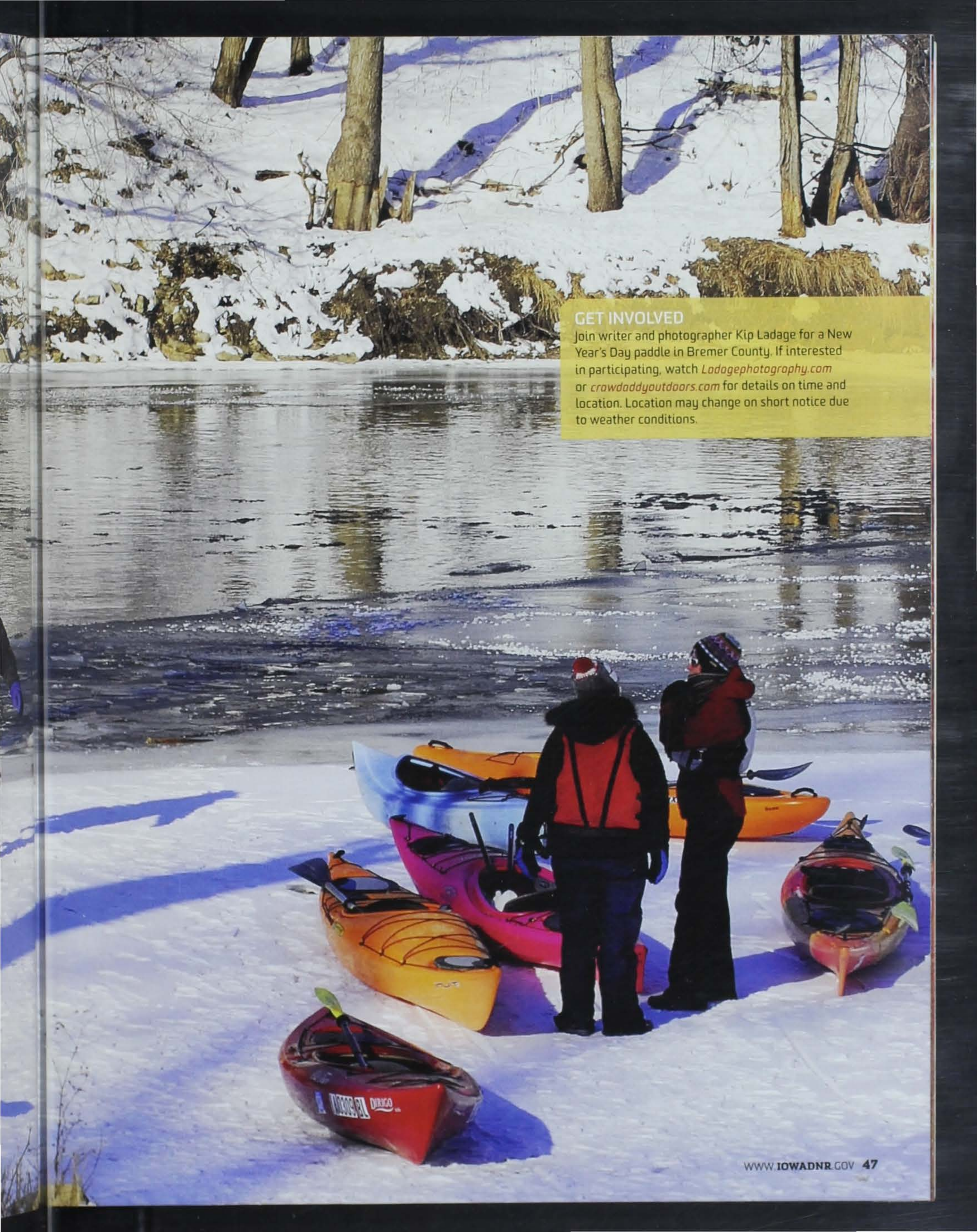
Choose gloves designed for winter use in wet conditions. Rubber/neoprene combination gloves work great for keeping your hands warm and dry while allowing enough dexterity to paddle efficiently and in comfort.

Plan short routes in stable water areas. Paddle for a short time and then get off the water. You want to dream of the next time you can paddle in cold weather, not dread the thought and never go again due to a bad experience. Be sure you wear your life jacket.

Darrin Siefken, owner of Crawdaddy Outdoors in Waverly (and winter paddling buddy), suggests specialized gear for longer trips. "For people paddling longer distances, wet suits and/or cold weather gear may be appropriate." He adds, "You should always carry a dry bag with a change of clothes in case you get wet."







GET INVOLVED

Join writer and photographer Kip Ladage for a New Year's Day paddle in Bremer County. If interested in participating, watch Ladagephotography.com or crowdaddyoutdoors.com for details on time and location. Location may change on short notice due to weather conditions.

WATER ACCESS/EGRESS - Even the most mild Iowa winters result in some ice along water's edge. That ice is at an angle and often very uneven and of varying thickness. Walk carefully when approaching and realize you are likely to be walking on shelf ice. Break a path through the shelf ice to open water while wearing neoprene chest waders. That path through the ice and over shallow water provides safer access and egress to the paddling area for all.

During extremely cold days, be prepared for rapid ice formation. It is not uncommon to have narrow ice paths freeze over in a short amount of time. If that narrow path is your route back to shore, be prepared to leave the water before you become caught in ice chunks. Siefken suggests pre-trip scouting if paddling from one access to another. "If you are planning to paddle from one point to another, be sure that stretch of water is open." It could be disastrous to be stopped by ice at a location nowhere near your final destination.

WEATHER CONDITIONS - While our cold weather paddling adventures have been incident-free, we have been challenged during a couple of New Year's Day paddle outings by near-blizzard conditions. Be prepared to abort the mission if the risk outweighs the benefits. Some days are simply better spent inside, rather than taking unnecessary risks on the water in cold and

threatening weather conditions.

VISIBILITY - Beautiful paddling conditions occur when temperatures are cold, the water is warmer than the air and fog develops. Should you venture out in fog, be very sure of your surroundings. Know the river you are paddling, know what to expect in the way of river hazards and prepare for the unexpected. Remember, when paddling in fog, you will not see chunks of ice floating toward you until they are very close. Be prepared for anything and be willing to get off the water, if necessary.

SHARE YOUR PLANS - It is imperative to tell someone where you are going, what time you expect to be off the water and any changes in your plans. As a public safety person who has participated in many missing person searches, it makes sense to stay in contact with others. If search and rescue is needed, efforts are much more efficient if we know your plan. *Make a plan, share your plan and follow your plan.* If your plan changes, let someone know. To assure you are able to maintain contact for status checks or to request assistance, carry your cell phone in a waterproof box or dry bag clipped to the kayak. Several styles of dry bags and boxes are available and they work well. Add one to your equipment list and use it.

Central Iowa Paddlers, an informal group of paddling enthusiasts formed in 1997, also holds an annual New Year's Day paddle in the Des Moines area, conditions permitting. To learn more about the paddle and the group of new and experienced paddlers, go to centraliowapaddlers.org.



SECURE YOUR EQUIPMENT - Whether you photograph great blue herons in the summer or bald eagles in the winter, you are likely to have some sort of valuable electronics with you. Winter paddling creates challenges not seen during the warm weather months. Winter paddlers wear layered clothing that reduces space in the kayak cockpit and limits movement. Gloves or mittens are a must, so handling cameras (and cell phones) becomes clumsy at best. Even if you don't use camera straps during warmer months, use them during winter paddling adventures. Gloves or cold hands can lead to clumsy butterfingers. Develop a routine for equipment storage when wearing thick clothing. The extra effort required is worthwhile when rewarded with cold weather paddling pictures or videos.

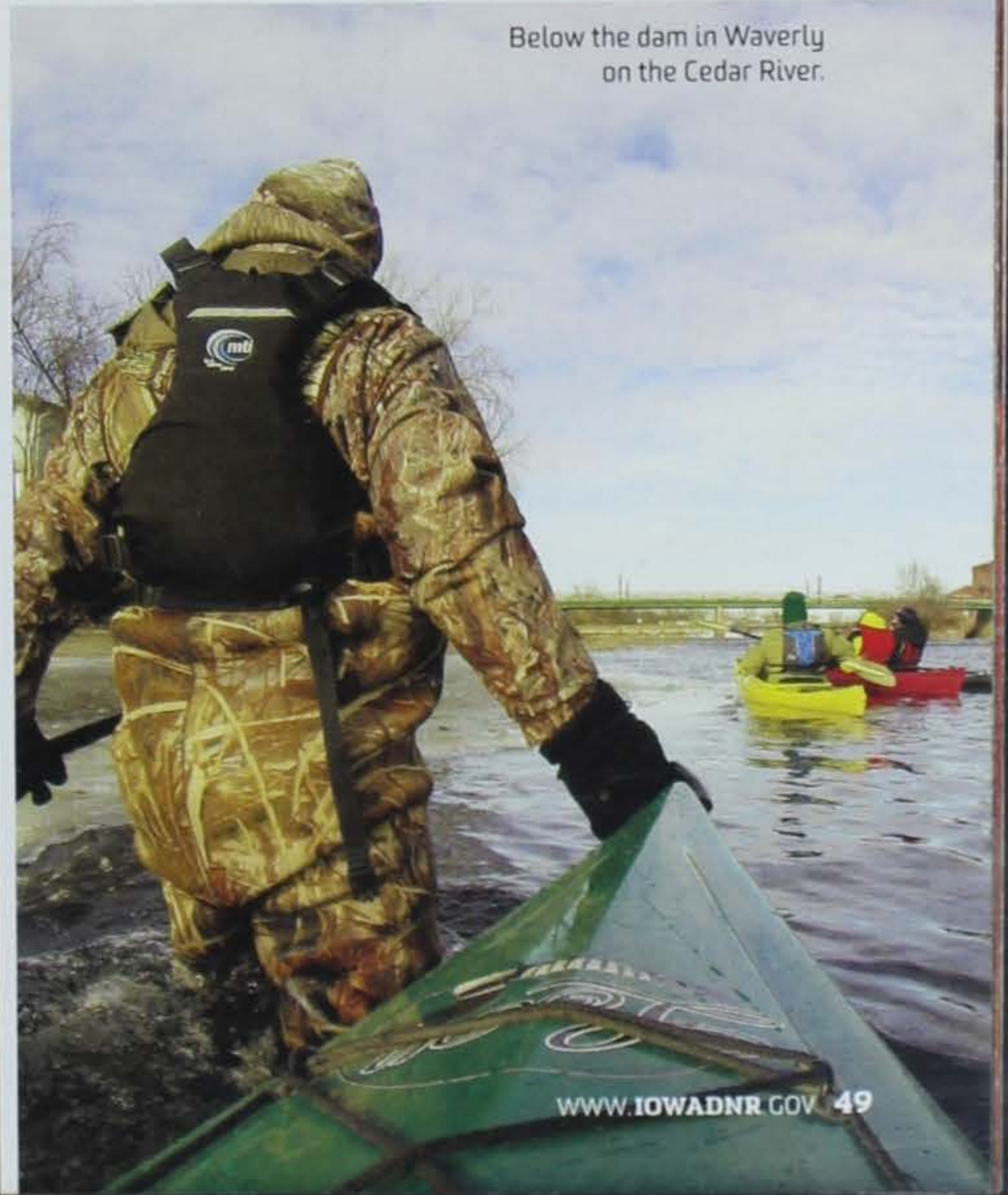
Siefken offers reassurance about the core paddling equipment. "There is not much to worry about with your kayak and paddle" in cold weather.

POST PADDLING WARM-UPS - Following our annual New Year's Day paddling adventures—after the kayaks, paddles, and life jackets are loaded and secured—we gather all paddlers together for hot chocolate and marshmallows. The hot chocolate warms our hands and our bellies, and the conversation and camaraderie reinforces friendships. Over time, the outing has proven popular and a great way to begin another year.

Winter paddling is an activity that relatively few people enjoy. Those who have experienced the thrill of cold weather paddling are quick to return to the water. Warm-weather paddlers who have not yet extended their outdoor season may want to give it a try. You might be surprised by how different, yet how much fun, cold weather paddling is. Maybe we'll even see you on one of our New Year's Day paddling adventures!

Join Us On New Year's Day

Over the years our New Year's Day paddling locations have been limited to five river stretches, all in Bremer County. Due to ice conditions, our most frequently used stretch is the Cedar River, below the dam in Waverly to the old Green Bridge, about a half-mile down. Our second most often used stretch is the Cedar River from the old Green Bridge in Waverly downstream until we are stopped by ice. On one occasion we paddled the Cedar River at Plainfield. After breaking ice we put in at the ramp at North Cedar Park. One mild winter we paddled the Cedar River above the dam from Kohlmann Park in Waverly upstream and back. A final river stretch, and our inaugural New Year's Day paddling outing, was the Wapsipinicon River near Tripoli. If interested in joining us this year, watch Ladagephotography.com or crowdaddyoutdoors.com for details. Locations may change on short notice due to weather conditions. 🐾



Below the dam in Waverly
on the Cedar River.

Action Cameras

A User's Overview

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIP LADAGE

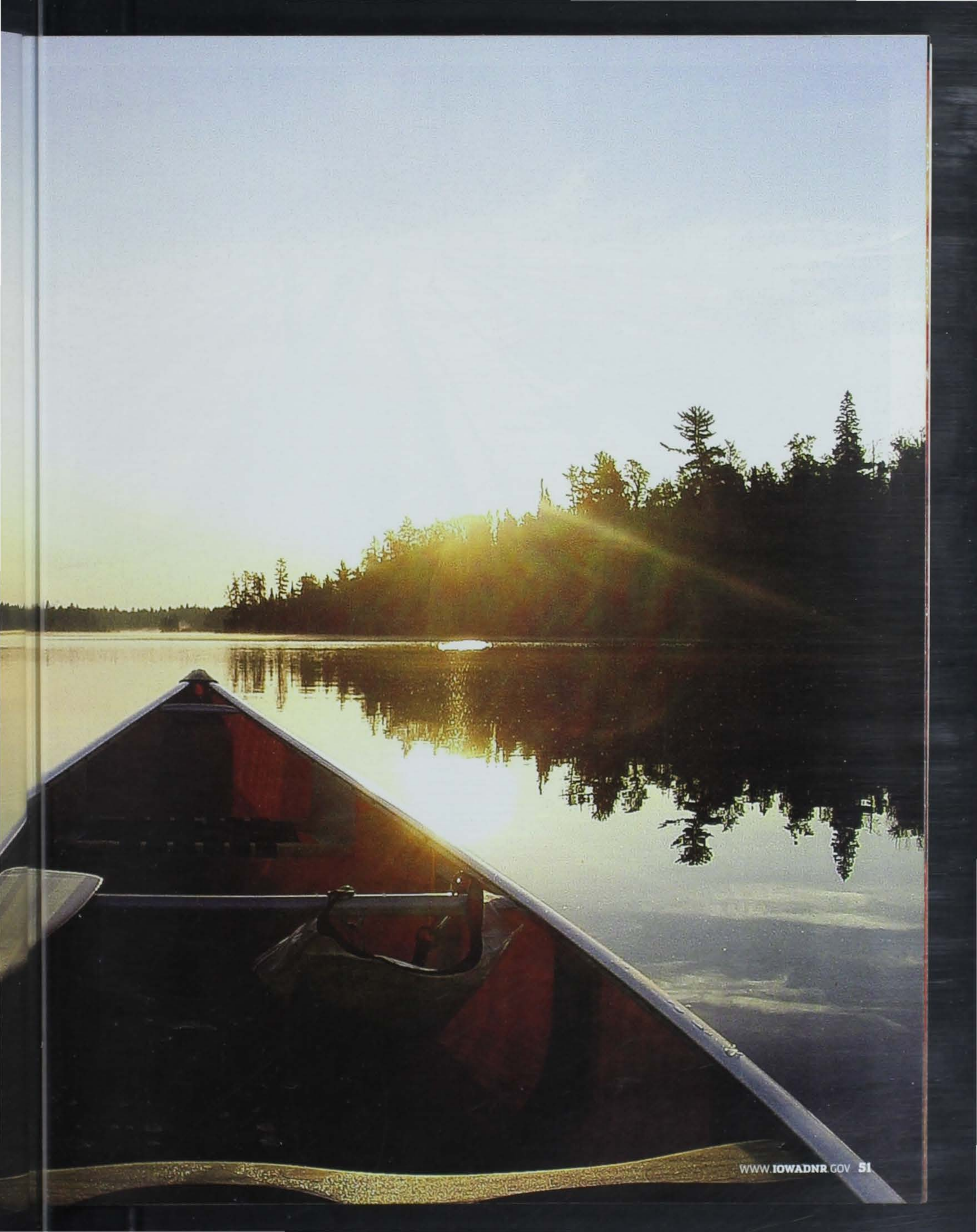
Walk through many outdoor stores and videos are playing non-stop—skiers in powdery snow on a mountaintop, divers swimming in crystal clear water or incredible views of wildlife from unusual perspectives. The videos are outstanding and help sell action cameras. But, for the ordinary person, do the cameras justify the expense? Are the cameras worth the trouble? What should you look for in an action camera?

I wondered the same when I was in the market for an action camera—would I use it and how would I use it? At one point I bought one, but took it back, unopened. I didn't think I would use it enough to justify the cost. Not long after, I received a GoPro camera as a gift. Now that I have one, I really like it. The tiny camera has really expanded my photography options.

So here is an overview from a real user. I'll share the good points, the not so good things and the challenges I have faced. While this article references my experience with a GoPro camera, this is not an endorsement for GoPro equipment.

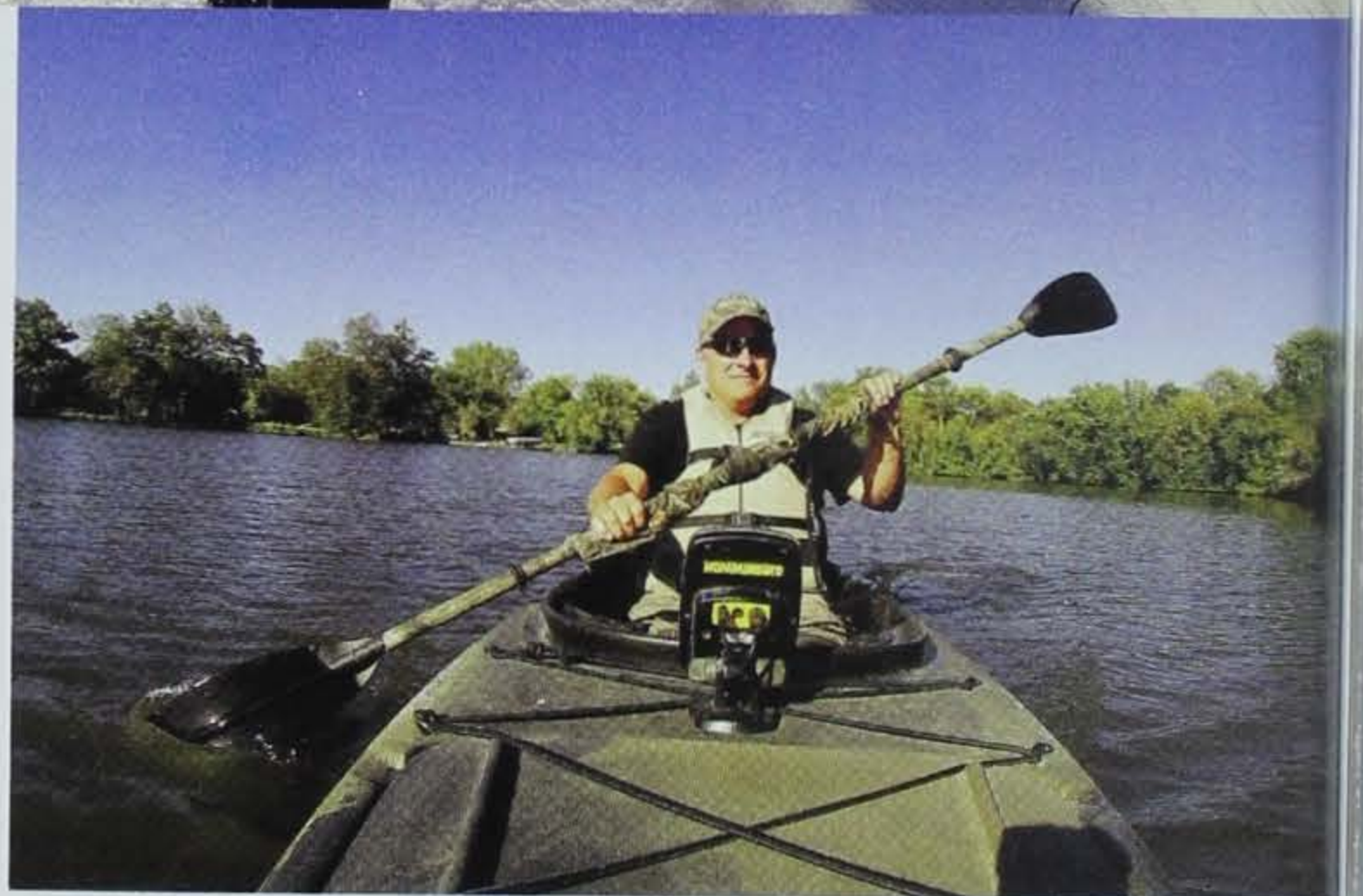
Video Quality

Action cameras produce very high quality videos. In fact, Hollywood and producers of nature programs have recognized the video quality coming from these tiny cameras. Video of big-game animal stampedes are produced with tiny action cameras. For video of dangerous situations, videographers put an action camera nearby to record it. The output of today's action cameras even suits today's





All photos in this story were taken with a small and rugged action camera. The cameras record video and can also produce photographs—some models do both simultaneously. Action cameras are a great tool for recording your adventures. Whether you use one to relive your fond memories or share them with others, today's cameras make the process relatively simple. With so much capability and an endless list of mounting options, nearly anyone can make great quality videos and photos. Cameras can be mounted on helmets, boats, bicycles, guns, fishing poles, bird feeders and virtually anywhere else the imagination or need takes you. They are an excellent way to record your adventures and share your fun.



high-definition production demands.

For average users, the wide range of video quality settings can be overwhelming. Knowing which frame rate or format to use can be very confusing. For beginners, your camera should record, at a minimum, 1080p video at 30 fps (frames per second). Video formats exceeding 1080p are used for high quality video productions. For general use, 1080p will be fine and looks great on high definition screens.

Durability

A good action camera is designed for abusive situations. Impacts, vibration, dust and wet environments all challenge the delicate lenses and electronics of small action cameras. My preference is for cameras with a separate housing. Housings offer extra protection. While separate housings protect the cameras from exposure to the elements, they do require attention and come with trade-offs. Be sure to watch the seal on the waterproof back. A noticeable drawback of the GoPro housing is that when using the waterproof back, the audio quality suffers since the microphone is covered. I have found no way to improve audio quality when using the waterproof back.

Video Sensitivity

While action cameras of all brands shoot pretty good video, realize they are not up to par with higher dollar video production cameras. Often, what action cameras lack in video sensitivity can be addressed, to a certain extent, using video editing software. More on that later.

Perspective

Most popular action cameras offer multiple settings for field of view. Field of view is how wide (or narrow) your camera sees. For example, GoPro camera users select from wide, medium and narrow fields of view. A wide field of

view allows users to take in the scene from directly in front of the camera to a long distance on either side. This option is great for scenic videos. But, that wide angle view comes with a caveat. Image content that normally is straight (canoe paddles, fishing rods, shotgun barrels, trees, buildings, etc.) will likely appear abnormal with very noticeable curves.

Medium and narrow settings provide a much more "normal" view. As their name implies, both settings show progressively less on either side, creating the appearance of being closer.

Simultaneous Video and Photo Mode or Frame Grabs Still Photos

Most people buy action cameras to record video. You might be surprised to learn the handy little cameras also shoot acceptable still photos. (Don't expect DSLR quality images, but do plan on pleasing images under the right conditions.) All photos for this article (except for the camera image below) were shot with my GoPro camera and processed as I do image files from my Nikon DSLR.

One of the most useful capabilities of action cameras is the ability to record still images while also shooting videos.

I typically have my camera shooting a still image every 10 seconds when videos are being recorded. With a bit of post-processing, still images shot with an action camera can look quite good. In fact, the files look so good that anytime I am in wet environments, my GoPro is exposed to the elements for imaging while my Nikon is safely tucked away and protected.

In the event your action camera does not have the simultaneous video and photo mode



By mounting an action camera, you can easily record yourself doing virtually any outdoor activity, whether you are going solo or with others on an adventure.





option, your video editing software may allow you to export a single frame of video. I have not found that feature as practical as recording still images when recording video, but it is an option if you forget to use the simultaneous video and photo mode feature or if your camera does not have it.

Video Flip

Sooner or later you may want to use your action camera underwater. If you mount it on a long handle for shooting video under your boat, or beside your kayak, or down your ice fishing hole, you will want to use the "video flip" option. That feature causes the camera to shoot everything upside down and allows you to avoid having to correct the video in editing software.

Viewfinder

GoPro cameras do not have a built-in viewfinder. Users aim the cameras and hope for the best. When you adjust the field of view, without a viewfinder, things get real interesting. An optional touchback viewfinder is available and works well. A "Touch BacPac" viewfinder connects to the back of some camera models and provides an electronic viewfinder and touchscreen control for the camera. Or, you can control the camera wirelessly using your smartphone as a viewfinder with a free phone app. Whether you add the touchback finder or go wireless with your phone, your battery will not last nearly as long. I make it a practice to use a viewfinder display for my initial set-up and then turn the viewfinder off until it is needed again.

Mount Options

The purchase of an action camera is only the beginning of your video making efforts and expenses. You will quickly find a desire to mount the camera on bicycle handlebars, your chest, helmet, windshield, shotgun or just about anything else you wish to use to capture your moments. Action camera manufacturers have an endless variety of mounts and accessories available. Third party mounts and accessories are also available, often at a lesser price. If you are handy with tools, you can make some mounts yourself and save considerable money.

One accessory that should be a priority is a safety tether. A simple safety tether may mean the difference between dropping your camera to the bottom of a lake or catching it before it is gone. Add a safety tether and use it!

Video Editing Software

Action cameras often come with video editing software. Some software is more user-friendly than others. An interesting feature for GoPro cameras is "Protune." Protune, when used while shooting, allows users to adjust video/photo settings as the recording is being made, similar to manual mode on a standard camera. Protune used in the video editing software (GoPro Studio)

provides a one-button adjustment that dramatically improves video quality by adjusting contrast, color saturation and sharpness.

Other options for video editing, often with fewer capabilities, are programs that come standard with computers. For many of my videos I use GoPro Studio software to assure the levels and sharpness are what I desire. I then export each video clip to a folder. From there I use other software to edit the final video together.

Other Uses

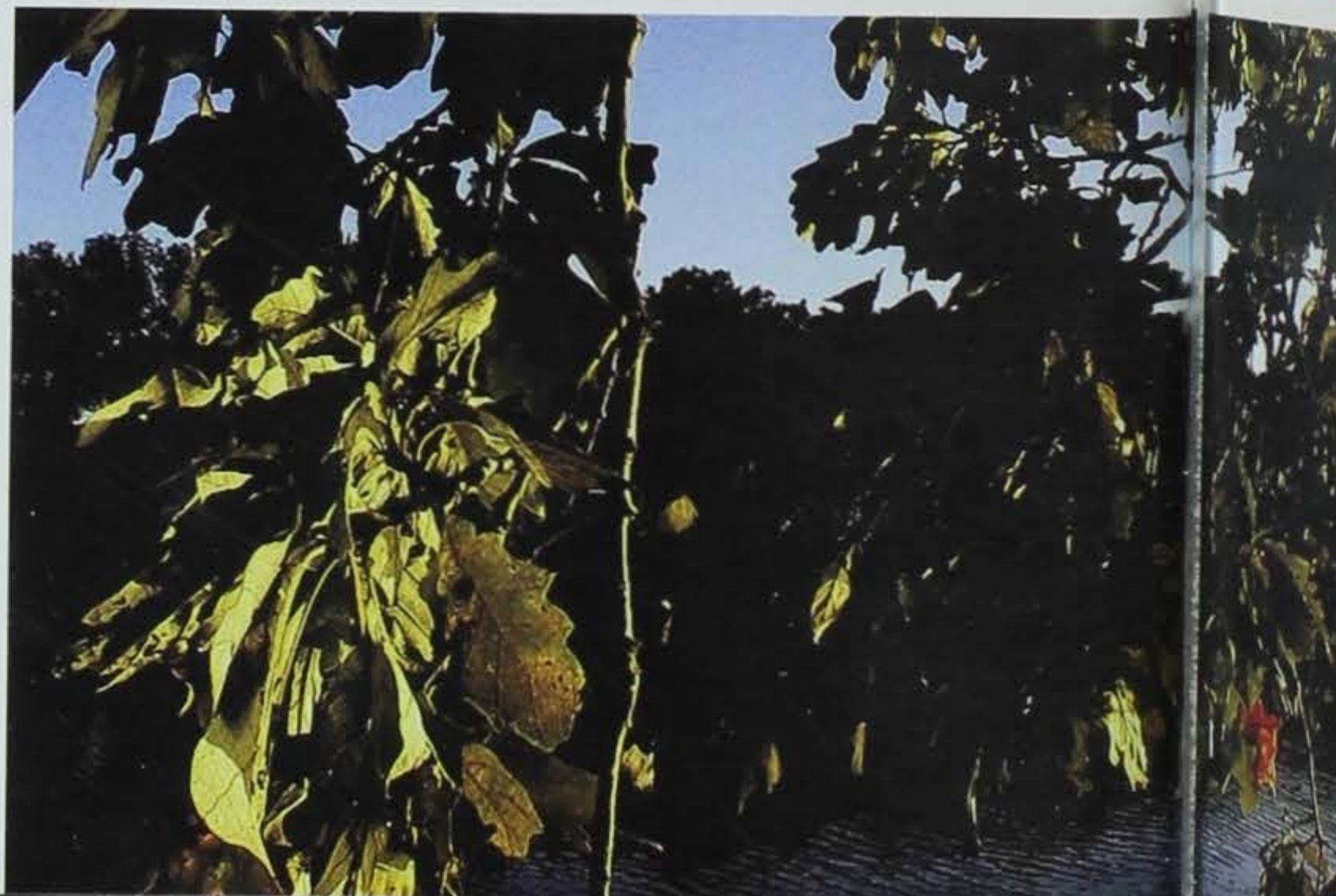
Use a tiny GoPro camera to shoot videos and still images where a typical camera is not practical, such as taking close range video of birds at feeders while remotely controlling the camera. My videos do not yet compare to *National Geographic*-type videos, but they are better than expected. More importantly, the wildlife was not disturbed by the little camera hidden nearby.

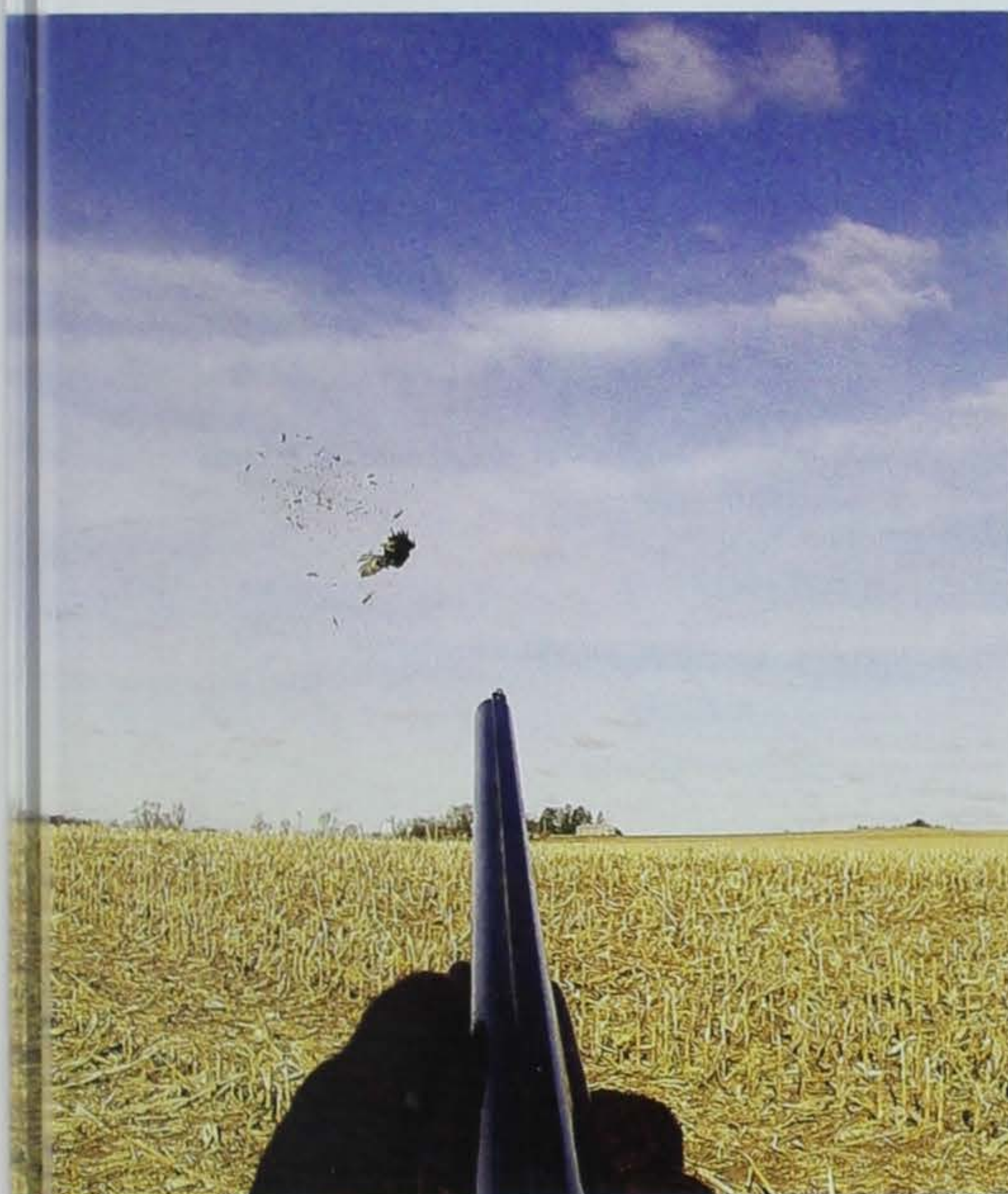
Challenges

Since the cameras are typically "worn" and not held, maintaining a horizontal horizon is an ongoing effort. Monitor the position of the camera and adjust as needed. It may be necessary to correct positioning issues in editing software.

Water drops, while adding to the reality of images, can ruin interesting videos. When shooting in wet environments, periodically wipe water from the lens. Apply Rain-X or a similar anti-beading solution to the camera housing lens to prevent water spots from forming when using your camera in rain or water. When Rain-X is not available, periodically licking your lens is a good backup solution. I have tried it and it works.

Action cameras are a great tool for recording your adventures. Whether you relive your fond memories or share them with others, today's cameras make the process relatively simple. With so much capability and an endless list of mount options, nearly anyone can make great quality videos. Go ahead...start recording your adventures and share your fun. 🐾





Rugged and waterproof, action cameras can handle environmental extremes. The lightweight and small designs allow them to be placed virtually anywhere to capture all sorts of outdoor pursuits from unique perspectives. For many users, they elevate creative abilities for photography and video.



Wild Cuisine CAMPSIDE

BY ALAN FOSTER



PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

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Venison Cabbage Rolls

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As for filler, rice is the go-to, but don't look past barley, corn grits, buckwheat groats or grated potato. Don't like cabbage? Try fresh beet or grape leaves.

Although the direct lineage of cabbage rolls cannot be certain, they can be traced back to Jewish cooking some 2,000 years ago. Regardless, cabbage rolls are pure comfort food. Savory meat, grain and seasonings wrapped in a slightly sweet, slightly bitter cabbage leaf that absorbs other flavors well—baked, simmered, slow cooked or fried—

ly. In a large bowl, combine rice, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, nutmeg, pepper and remaining onion and salt. Crumble in venison and sausage and mix well. Remove thick vein of cabbage leaves for easier rolling. Place about one cup of mixture on each leaf. Fold starting with the removed vein end, fold in sides then roll. Place seam-side down in baking dish. Top with sauce. Bake at 350° for an hour or until meat reaches 160° and cabbage is tender. Add a little tomato juice if it dries out.

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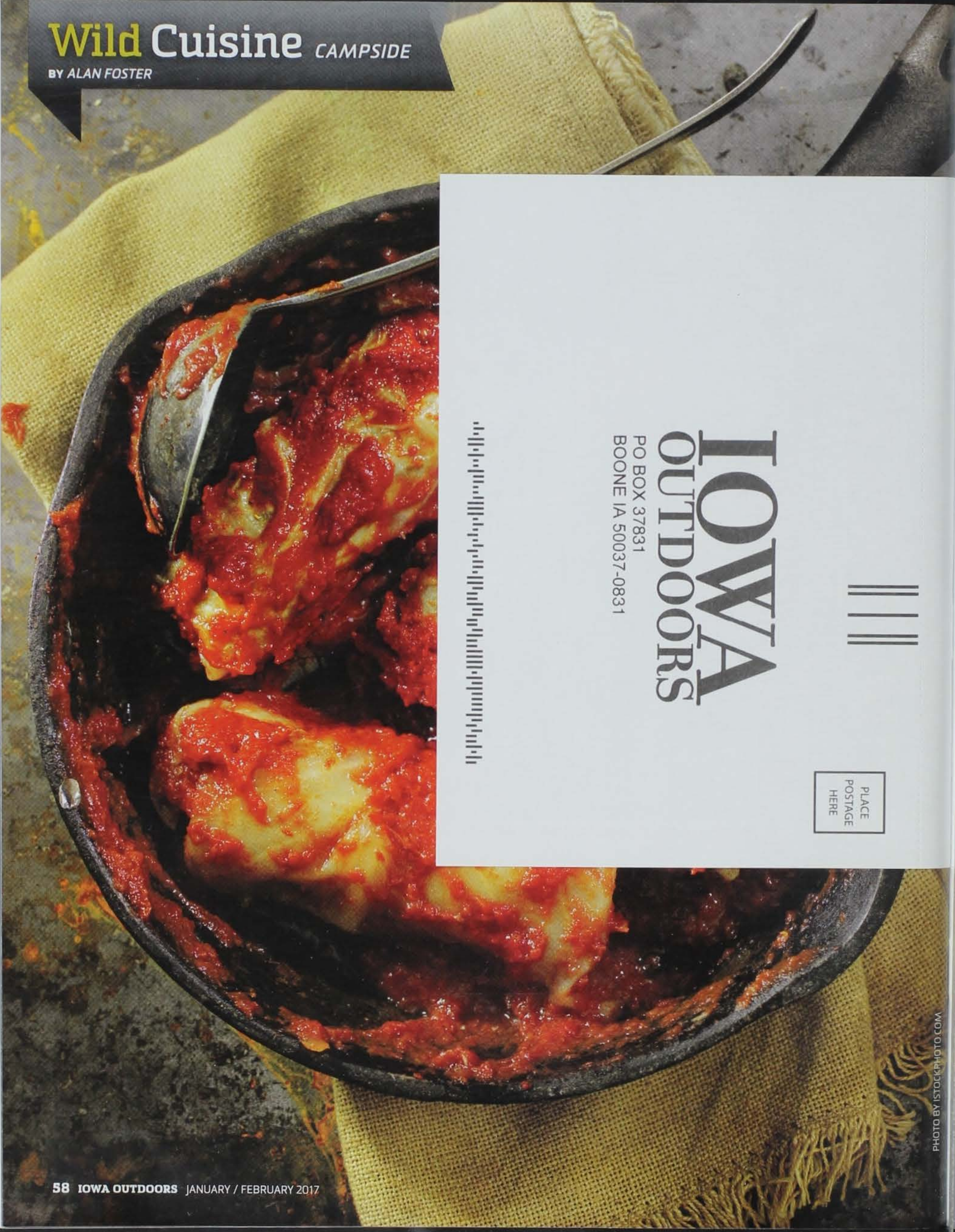
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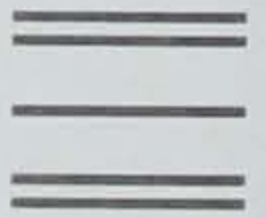
Wild Cuisine CAMPSIDE

BY ALAN FOSTER



IOWA OUTDOORS

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Venison Cabbage Rolls

Cabbage rolls are the European cousin of American chili in that every recipe is different. The choice of protein—or whether to even have any—the sauce, the condiments, the ingredients, the grains, the cooking method, even the name—vary uniquely by region.

In Poland, golabki is made with pork, beef and rice or barley. In neighboring Czech Republic and Slovakia, holubky is similar, set apart by the preferred sauce. In Ukraine, holubtsi is stuffed with buckwheat groat, fried onions and pork cracklings. On special occasions, minced meat is added. Russians incorporate sour cream into their sauce for golubsty, as do other nationalities. In Sweden, Nov. 30 is the day of the cabbage roll. Lingonberry jam adds sweetness. In Bulgaria, chopped mint, sweet paprika and yogurt are served with the sarmi. In Romania, sarmale is the traditional dish at Christmas, New Year's Eve, weddings, baptisms and other celebrations. Sarma, stuffed with smoked ground pork, is a Croatian Christmas favorite.

While a tomato-based sauce reigns in most countries, beef, vegetable or miso broth can be used. Pickled cabbage—sauerkraut—is also used. Some like it savory, some like it sweet. As for filler, rice is the go-to, but don't look past barley, corn grits, buckwheat groats or grated potato. Don't like cabbage? Try fresh beet or grape leaves.

Although the direct lineage of cabbage rolls cannot be certain, they can be traced back to Jewish cooking some 2,000 years ago. Regardless, cabbage rolls are pure comfort food. Savory meat, grain and seasonings wrapped in a slightly sweet, slightly bitter cabbage leaf that absorbs other flavors well—baked, simmered, slow cooked or fried—

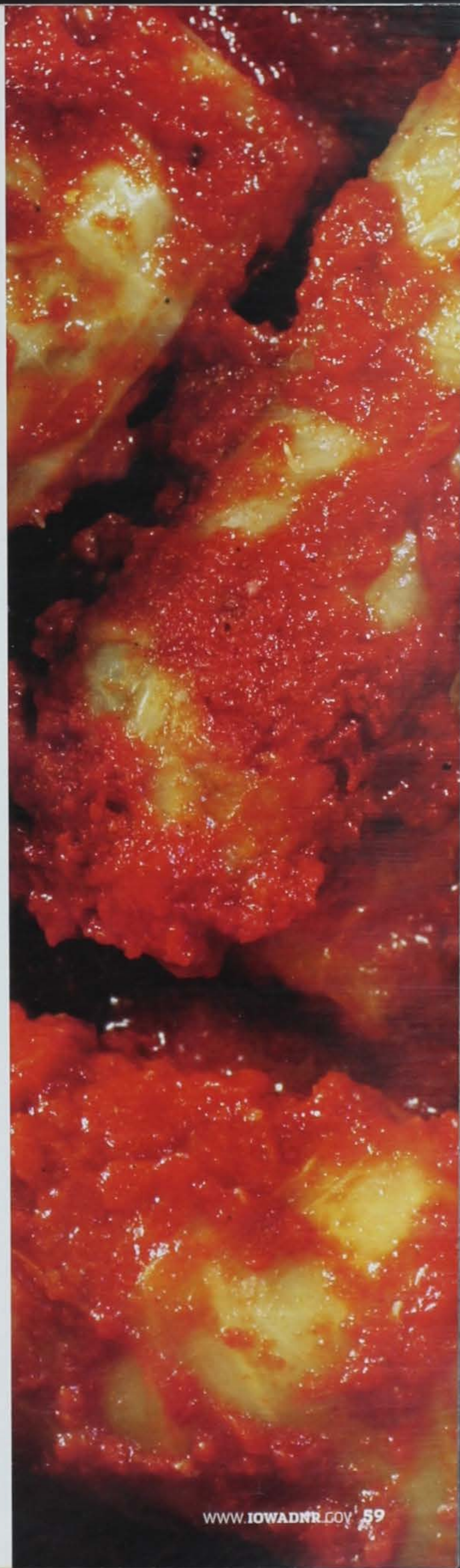
nestled in a sweet, savory, tangy or creamy sauce.

So pull out some ground venison, and try out this traditional cabbage roll recipe. Or explore the countless recipe versions on the internet. Either way, cabbage rolls will make a cold winter evening much more palatable.

VENISON CABBAGE ROLLS

1 pound ground venison
1/4 pound Italian sausage
2 cups chopped onion, divided
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 cup cooked rice
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1/4 cup ketchup
1 1/2 teaspoons salt, divided
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
2 cans Italian stewed tomatoes
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 tablespoon butter
1 medium size cabbage

In large pot or Dutch oven, cook cabbage in boiling water for 10 minutes or until outer leaves are tender. Drain and rinse in cold water. Remove 8 to 10 outer leaves. Refrigerate cabbage for another use. In a large saucepan, sauté 1 cup onion in butter until tender. Add tomatoes, garlic, brown sugar and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Simmer 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. In a large bowl, combine rice, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, nutmeg, pepper and remaining onion and salt. Crumble in venison and sausage and mix well. Remove thick vein of cabbage leaves for easier rolling. Place about one cup of mixture on each leaf. Fold starting with the removed vein end, fold in sides then roll. Place seam-side down in baking dish. Top with sauce. Bake at 350° for an hour or until meat reaches 160° and cabbage is tender. Add a little tomato juice if it dries out.



BY ERIKA BILLERBECK



Wild Things

“Welcome to Wild Things,” I told the group. “You will find that Wild Things is different than school. Here, it’s okay to get dirty. It’s okay to get muddy. It’s okay to get wet.” A big grin broke out on every kid’s face. And so began the first session of “Wild Things,” my new after-school program.

Once a week after school, the kids and I pile into a big van and head out to nearby “wild” areas. For a couple hours, these early elementary-aged kids build forts, explore, catch grasshoppers, walk in creeks, pretend, climb trees, chase frogs, stuff rocks in their pockets and generally act like kids set loose in nature.

Sound familiar? That’s because, if you are over the age of 35, you likely spent a good chunk of your own childhood doing the exact same things. When we were young and outdoors, there was rarely an adult looming over us, directing our every move. Adults weren’t always there to stop us from doing something they deemed “too dangerous,” they weren’t hovering and imploring us to keep our shoes clean, and they weren’t interfering by making up the rules to the games we invented. Our discoveries were our own—and they led to personalized risk assessment and self-directed learning. It sounds idyllic, and in a way, impossible, when we talk about it now.

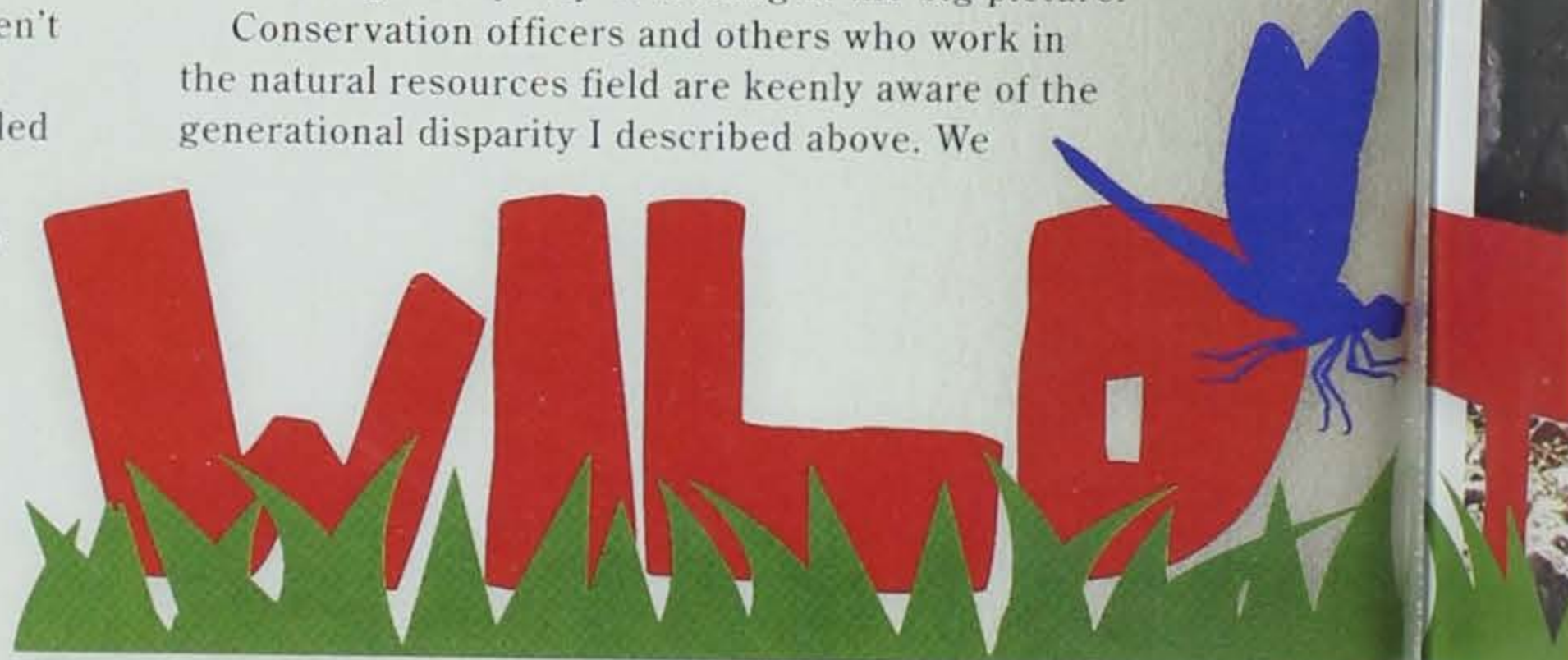
There are always exceptions, but by and large, childhood is very different for our kids today than it was even a generation ago. Quite simply, kids today aren’t afforded the same opportunities many of us had, to have unstructured, free-play and exploration in nature. I don’t want to blame extremely busy parents who always strive to do

what is best for their children. Every now and then, even the best among us fall victim to societal changes and pressures. But let’s face it—many kids are supervised almost constantly. We incessantly dish out instructions and directions to our kids. We imply that the outdoors is a dangerous place for a kid to be on his/her own. And we shuttle our young ones (often our very youngest ones) from one adult-led, structured activity to another in an attempt to enrich their lives. For many, if our children do make it outdoors, it is likely to be on the manicured field of an organized sport. Kids in today’s society are on a technological leash stronger than steel.

You might be asking yourself why I care...shouldn’t I be concentrating on catching poachers or worrying about the hunters in the field today? Am I wasting precious work time playing with kids in the woods?

The short answer, in my opinion, is NO. I think it is prudent to take the long view, to see the big picture. Wild Things is my way of looking at the big picture.

Conservation officers and others who work in the natural resources field are keenly aware of the generational disparity I described above. We





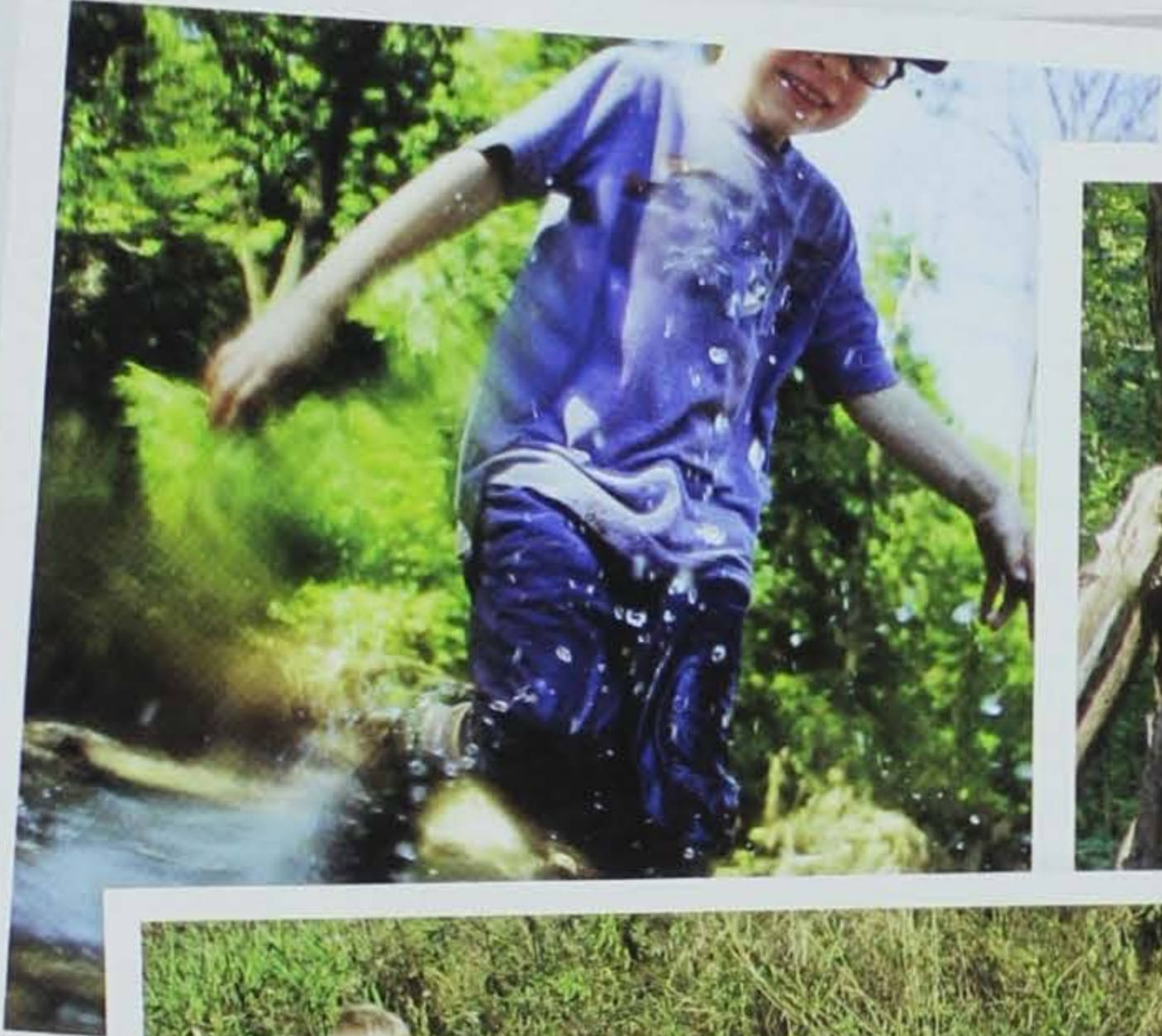
Warden's Diary



are aware of it on many levels: monetarily, in terms of wildlife management and land use, of changes in historical traditions as well as for the general future of our state's natural resources.

So what is the big picture? When I look at the big picture, I wonder where we will be two or three generations from now, when an outdoor experience for a majority of children consists of something they watched on a screen.

Many conservation officers are taking the long view. They are constantly (and perhaps too quietly) trying to connect with young people in a concerted effort to engage them in outdoor pursuits through mentored hunts and fishing outings. Throughout our history, hunting and fishing has been a tradition handed down from one generation to the next. If a youth lacks an experienced adult to take them, a mentored hunt can be an excellent opportunity for a young person to learn the skills that



make for a safe and enjoyable experience. Hopefully they continue practicing those skills and someday pass them onto their own children.

There are many good reasons to introduce young people to “consumptive” outdoor activities like hunting or fishing, as well as related sports like shooting and archery. One reason (as superficial as it may at first sound) is financial.

Currently in Iowa, everything from the purchase of public wildlife management areas, to the care of such areas, to the salaries and equipment of those tasked with protecting such areas, is almost solely funded by the Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. The Trust Fund in turn, is almost solely funded by hunting and fishing license sales and the sale of habitat fees (which currently are almost exclusively purchased by sportsmen and sportswomen), as well as money generated by the sales of hunting and shooting sports

equipment (via the Pittman Robertson Act). Based on data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the numbers of license holders in Iowa has been on a steady decline since before 2009, which quite simply means the money used to maintain and protect wildlife and wildlife areas is declining as well.

Many people who love nature enjoy using Iowa’s wildlife management areas for “non-consumptive” activities such as hiking, birding, watching meteor showers, photography, walking the dog, mountain biking, picnicking or for the perfect romantic meeting spots. They do so, often not knowing that their money (tax or otherwise), is not being used in a way that impacts that land or its wild inhabitants. That is, unless those same folks decide to purchase a habitat fee or a hunting/fishing license.

So do I expect that every child who goes through the “Wild Things” program becomes a consumptive user (and therefore a financial contributor) of our wildlife management areas? Not really—and that’s okay. I know that it’s unrealistic (and a little bit boring) to expect that every nature-loving child move onto hunting or fishing as they get older. But I also know that very few hunters and anglers are born of a person with no connection to or love for nature.

My intention with Wild Things was to start at the point where the seeds of imagination and hope germinate. I want my young Wild Things to know what it feels like to lie under a canopy of leaves and watch a squirrel jump from one branch to another. I want them to imagine what it would be like to be the caterpillar making its impossible way through a tall tangle of weeds. I hope that they will create a memory of what a sandy creek-bed feels like on the soles of the feet. I want them to know how it feels to reach down and pluck a 300 million year old fossil out of the water and hold it in their hands.

Allowing a child to spend time in a natural place on his/her own unstructured terms is one of the most important things we, as adults, can do. The results can be invaluable and far-reaching for the child’s well being and development. This fact is evidenced by multiple published scientific studies. And I would hazard to guess that it is equally as important for the well being and future of our natural places.

Maybe by the time these young Wild Things are adults, the responsibility of caring for, paying for and maintaining our wild places will be shared more equally among its users. But if not, at least these young people will have a basic foundation for what it means to be connected to a place. And maybe those connections will foster an ethic for, and a sense of stewardship for, those wild places. The places where they learned what it is like to be a child holding the earth’s history in their hands.

Every week I am reminded that there is hope. 🐾





READER'S FINAL ACT TO SUPPORT IOWA OUTDOORS RUTH HELEN DIAL, PARIS, TEXAS

The *Iowa Outdoors* magazine staff wish to thank the late Ruth Helen Dial (1921-2015) of Paris, Texas, for a charitable donation from her estate. Her last will and testament specified the donation support *Iowa Outdoors* magazine. We are humbled by her actions.

Dial was born in Walworth, Wis. As a child, she enjoyed time outdoors ice skating, sledding, ice fishing and ice boating. After high school, she attended medical technology school in St. Louis and later worked in hospitals in Pittsburgh, Chicago and Kansas. She moved to Iowa and worked for numerous physicians before retiring and moving to Texas in 1978. She was known for her volunteerism and her great love of dogs.

Evidently our state left an impression upon her, as she was a faithful *Iowa Outdoors* subscriber until her death.

Readers interested in donating can make a **tax-deductible contribution to *Iowa Outdoors* magazine with the special donation envelope found in this issue. We appreciate your support.**

FEED THE NEED, DONATE TREES!

GOATS ON THE GO, AMES —BY MARIAH GRIFFITH

If you want an environmentally- and wallet-friendly way to dispose of your natural Christmas tree this year, bring it (cleared of tinsel and ornaments) to the Goats on the Snow event in Ames Jan. 7 at 3892 North 500 Ave. from noon to 2 p.m. The event is put on by Goats on the Go, a conservation-conscious vegetation management service. Drop off your tree for free and watch friendly goats in festive hats gobble it up. As an added bonus, eating pine needles and bark helps keep the goats healthy by discouraging internal parasites.

Goats on the Go co-owner Chad Steenhoek says the event is a win-win, showing the community the value of goats, raising awareness for the business and giving people an economical way to recycle their trees. "Plus, it's a great way to make the fun of the holidays last a little longer," adds co-owner Aaron Steele.

Steele first got interested in goats as a management option for overgrown plants on a few acres of his personal land outside Ames. "My family got a handful of goats in the spring with the intention of sending them to market in the fall, but we liked them so much we ended up getting more instead," Steele laughs.

As his personal herd continued to expand, Steele saw an opportunity to offer their weed- and brush-munching services commercially as an alternative to methods like mowing and herbicide treatments. Thus, Goats on the Go launched in 2012 as a partnership between Steele and longtime friend Steenhoek, who also had goats and had previously established a composting business that the goats could contribute to.

Since then, the Ames herd has expanded to 300, and the business has expanded to include affiliates in Iowa City, Pella, Cedar Rapids and Des Moines. All affiliates service a 35-mile radius for projects of 10 acres or less during the growing season, and work as a team to service larger areas throughout Iowa and beyond.

"It's great to work with goats because they're very agile and determined to get to the brush and weeds they eat, but they're also very engaging for the public and have great personalities," Steele says.

He says the goats learn to eat a variety of undesirable plants at a young age, as kids are put out to forage along with their mothers on project sites. The Goats on the Go website lists some problem plants the goats are often hired to knock back, including ragweed, buckthorn, honeysuckle, poison ivy and wild parsnip. According to Steele, the 40 or so goats brought to a small project can mow through an acre of overgrown vegetation every three to four days, and the larger herds brought to big projects can eat nearly two acres in one day.

"We do intensive grazing with a lot of goats in a small area," says Steenhoek. "That way the job gets done quickly and there's minimal erosion or other issues you can run into with having goats around for a long time."

"There are a lot of variables involved, but generally the goats work pretty quickly and land owners don't mind them being around," says Steele. The Goats on the Go website explains goats have minimal odor, are fairly quiet, their dung is excellent fertilizer and most seeds of weedy plants they eat won't sprout after passing through the digestive process.

Goats on the Go also offers consultations and educational sessions to help landowners start their own goat herds. Visit goatsonthego.com or call 515-257-6846 for more information.



GOAT PHOTO BY BEN CURTIS

IMPROVED WINTER DRIVING

Updated Tools From Iowa's DOT help Readers Get Outside After Snowstorms



Ready to throw the cross-country skis in the car or head to your favorite lake for some ice fishing? Before you drive to that perfect winter recreation spot, the Iowa Department of Transportation is there to make traversing Iowa roadways as safe as possible and give you new tools to make safer travel decisions.

Onboard Cameras and GPS Aid Snow Removal and Roadway Information

In the 2014-15 winter season, the Iowa DOT updated an integrated GPS and vehicle location system, installing as a pilot project on a portion of the snowplow fleet. "This year we completed installation, bringing our entire fleet of more than 900 vehicles online to the updated Skyhawk system," says Craig Bargfrede, the Iowa DOT's winter operations administrator.

The system collects information on truck location and speed, material type and rate being applied to the road, as well as truck data such as fuel use and engine diagnostics. Using cellular communications, data is transmitted so supervisors and others can monitor and make decisions.

"Many of our snowplow operators have been working the roads in the same areas for a long time. There is nothing that can replace experience, but now more than ever we rely on data to drive many decisions we

make," says Bargfrede. It improves the Iowa DOT's efforts to clear state highways, U.S. routes and the interstate system as quickly and efficiently as possible during and following a snowstorm.

Keeping Plows on the Road

With Skyhawk, monitoring and catching potential defects in the way a truck is operating is critical. "Our mechanics are able to monitor data coming off a truck to see how the engine and other systems are performing. Catching and correcting issues very early can save a great deal of time and money, whether that's something simple like a leaking hose or a more serious engine failure," says Bargfrede, who adds that getting equipment repaired and back on the road quickly is critical to keeping roads safe.

Precision Salt Use Saves Money, Protects Environment

Salt is one of the most useful materials to combat snow and ice. Whether in rock form or mixed with water to create brine, it clears roadways more quickly, but can also have undesirable environmental impact if overused. Balancing salt usage that is both effective and least impactful is another element built into the data collection process.

"One of the largest expenses associated with fighting snow and ice

each year is the cost of salt," Bargfrede says. For each snowplow truck, "It's critical that equipment used to spread salt and other materials is calibrated precisely. Errors in calibration can waste tens of thousands of dollars and cause unnecessary environmental impacts if not caught and corrected."

Watch Snowplow Truck Cams and Follow Locations in Real Time

"People often ask where the plows are currently working during a winter storm," says Andrea Henry from the Iowa DOT's Office of Strategic Communications. "Using data collected from our trucks, we are able to map plow locations and even show images from cameras mounted to the plows' windshields. We have all that on a very popular website trackaplow.iowadot.gov."

Eric Abrams, the Iowa DOT's geographic information systems team leader, says, "The driving factor behind technology we implement is to help our customers stay safe. Track a plow is just more information travelers can use to see what is happening on the roadways to make informed decisions regarding their travel plans."

Another tool for motorists is Iowa's 511 system that provides detailed information on road condition and incidents, as well as views from hundreds of stationary cameras positioned along roadways statewide.

Motorists can tailor 511 to their needs, setting options to send alerts for specific routes and many customizable features. The 511 system is available online at 511ia.org and as an app for both iOS and Android.

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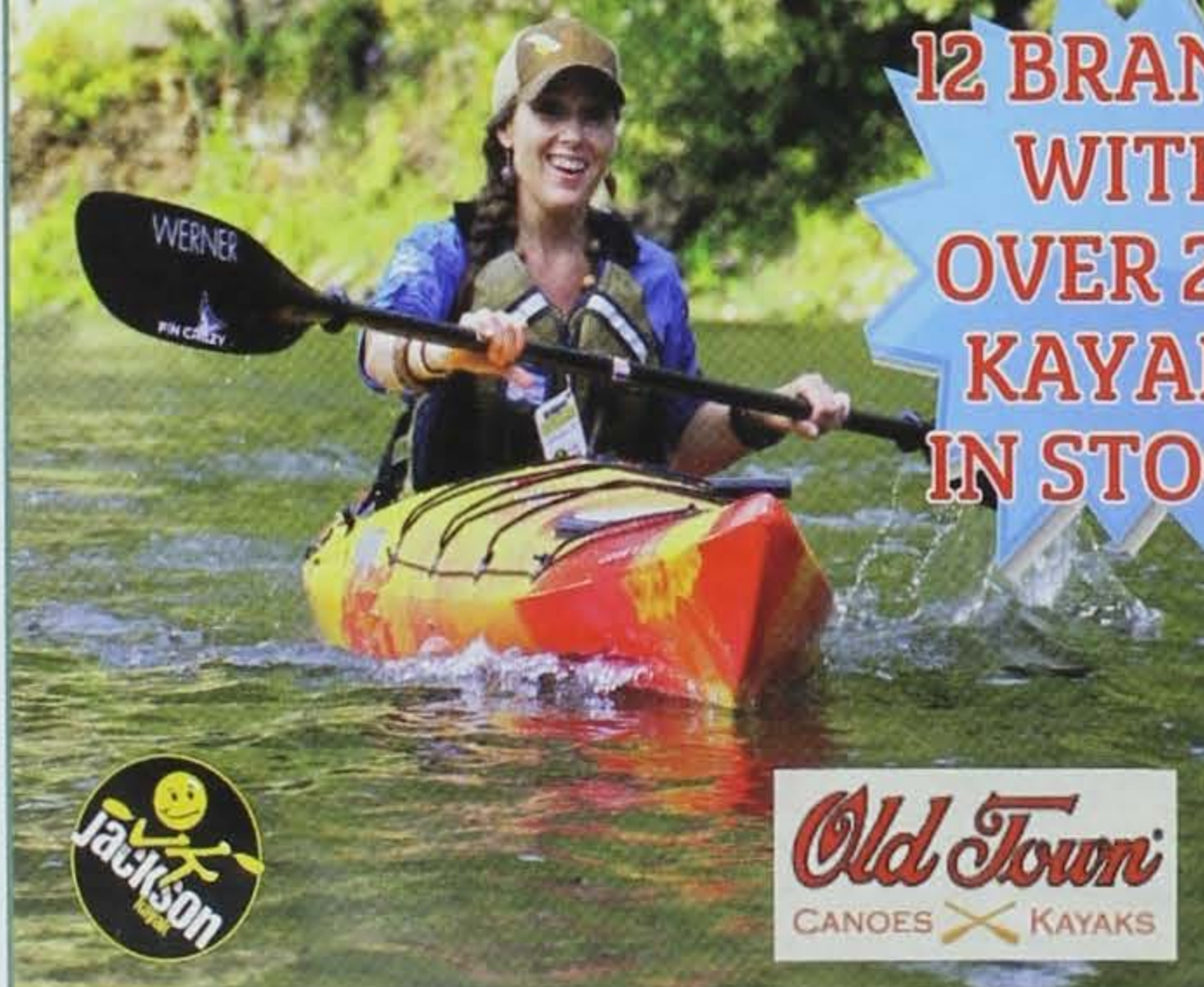
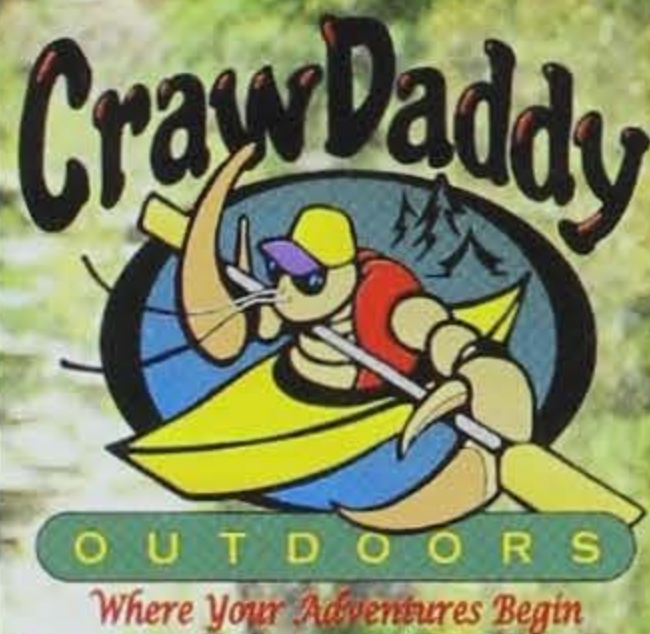


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