

Nebraska Geographic

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Happy Haunted Halloween

Some Nebraska destinations can give you the chills. Of those, some are meant to be spooky. Others may just feel that way during certain times of the day or during gloomy, dark, or severe weather conditions. And possibly a handful of others really do have something unexplainable going on. Here's a rundown of some Nebraska destinations that have caused the hair on the back of my neck to stand up on occasion.

Centennial Hall Museum

This brick structure with rows of arched windows has been a Valentine landmark since 1897. Claim to fame: It's the oldest standing high school building in Nebraska. Pioneer belongings, religious artifacts, and local school and military relics fill the former classrooms. A visitor will occasionally ring one of the 1,700 bells in the museum's Hallock Bell Collection. Some say that's not the only music heard here. Even though the instruments were removed decades ago, visitors report notes coming from the school's former music room.

Local folklore recounts the death of a female student in the 1940s after her clarinet reed was poisoned. Is her disembodied presence responsible for the ghostly tunes or the rocking chair seen rocking on its own? Probably not. My friends over at the Cherry County Historical Society have been unable to authenticate that the murder ever took place. Spiritual energy aside, there's something else unexpected lurking here, a thrift shop.

The Centennial Hall Museum is located at the corner of 3rd and Macomb sts., in Valentine. (402) 376-1455.

Lake McConaughy

The village of Lemoyne was relocated to make way for Lake McConaughy in Keith County. The lake project was developed in the name of flood control and irrigation. By 1941, Lemoyne's buildings had been moved to the current location of the community, and their abandoned foundations flooded by the flows of the North Platte River as the lake climbed toward full pool.

Today, Lemoyne is a lakeside village with a population of about 300 with a senior center, a fire and rescue facility equipped with rescue boats, and several businesses catering to lake visitors. Lemoyne Cemetery sits on a hill overlooking

the lake. When water levels decline to their lowest points in drought years during irrigation season, remnants of the original Lemoyne townsite reappear.

Foundations of buildings such as Carey's Garage, the old Brown's Hotel, and Melville Lumber emerge along with bits of brick and shards of glass mixed with the sand. It can seem creepy, especially on a dreary, foggy day. The creepiest remnant of all is the soaked concrete root cellar that seems out of place, filled with murky water that contains memories of old Lemoyne – and who knows what else.

Indian Cave State Park

You might think that the cave this park is named for is the spooky part of the place. In my opinion, the spacious, fairly well-lit cave is anything but spooky. Within the park is the original townsite of the village of St. Deroin. Yep, you guessed it, the St. Deroin Cemetery is still there.

Local residents eagerly share the historical account of town founder Joseph Deroin, the son of an Otoe woman and a French fur trapper. Known for his hot temper, Deroin was attempting to collect on a \$6 debt when he was shot by settler James Biddow in 1858. Deroin was buried atop his favorite horse. The killer was later acquitted of the crime. From time-to-time visitors report hearing the cacophony of horse hooves clopping in the distance.

Stranger still is the story of A.J. Ritter, another current inhabitant of St. Deroin Cemetery. He was supposedly using dynamite to catch fish when he accidentally blew off an arm. The remains of the detached appendage were reportedly buried west of the village. Ritter died years later and was interred at St. Deroin. Park staff keep alive the legend of Ritter's ghost rising on foggy nights in search of his lost arm. Indian Cave State Park is located near Shubert in Richardson County.

Happy Jack Chalk Mine

More than a mile of twisting underground caverns is a description likely to give the shivers to some folks. Add to it that bats live in the mine, and that it is blacker than midnight in there, and you've got a recipe for fear. In reality, those bats are few and focus on eating insects (please leave them be), and the volunteers at the mine are happy to shed plenty of light on the subject while guiding tours

The mine was blocked off years ago when I snuck in for the first time. I'd heard tales of people racing motorcycles through the tunnels, crazy parties and bonfires, and the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang on at least one occasion camping out near the cave entrance in the 1970s. In recent years, organized Trail of Terror Haunted Hallow events at the mine have become legendary in their own right. The Happy

Jack Chalk Mine is located south of North Loup and Scotia along Nebraska Highway 11. Happy Halloween.

Safe travels – and watch for deer!