

Nebraska Geographic

with ALAN J. BARTELS

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New column chronicles Cornhusker State travels

The Nebraska Tourism Commission proudly and rightfully proclaims that tourism – which contributes more than \$3 billion to Nebraska’s economy each year – is our state’s third largest industry. In my opinion (and this is my column), that fact should not come as a surprise to any Nebraskan, and it is something to be proud of.

Here are a few Nebraska travel gems to drive the point home: the Pine Ridge, NEBRASKAland Days in North Platte, the Greeley Irish Festival, Omaha Zoo, Lake McConaughy near Ogallala, the Buffalo Commons Storytelling Festival in McCook, The Archway near Kearney, Monowi in Boyd County, the Ponca Tribe’s annual powwow near Niobrara, Nebraska’s Big Rodeo in Burwell, the sandhill crane migration, the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey and Thedford, Lewis and Clark Lake in Knox County on the Nebraska-South Dakota border, the National Willa Cather Center in downtown Red Cloud, the Nebraska State Capitol in Lincoln, Popcorn Days in North Loup, Smith Falls State Park in Cherry County, Happy Jack Peak and Chalk Mine near Scotia – and of course – the Nebraska Sandhills.

I could go on, and on, and on. But instead of boring readers with a long list, I hope to inform and entertain with my new travel column, *Nebraska Geographic*. In each column I will tap into experiences gathered during my decades as a writer and photographer, and share favorites gleaned during my time as a lifelong adventurous Nebraskan.

Although I think we should welcome the valuable tourism dollars of travelers from afar, the intent of this column isn’t to bring outsiders in. No, my hope is to inspire my fellow Nebraskans to visit the communities, events, businesses, and attractions of our state. I’d be rich if I had \$1 for every time I’ve heard a Nebraskan say something like, “I’ve lived here all my life and have never went to see the cranes,” or “We’ve driven past Happy Jack Peak and Chalk Mine hundreds of times but never stopped.”

I won’t only be writing only about the well-known things to see and do. I believe that many of Nebraska’s best destinations truly are off the beaten path. Ever had cinnamon rolls from the Madrid General Store in Madrid, kolaches from Verdigre Bakery in Verdigre, a Tin Roof Sundae from the Potter Sundry in Potter, lemon merengue pie from the Pioneers Inn in Gilead, or a burger from the Nebrask Inn in Gross (pop. 2)? Or have you ever perused the titles at Plains Trading Company Booksellers in Valentine, experienced the 4-seat Catholic chapel in Dwight,

attended the Groundhog Day celebration in Unadilla, or been to BerryPepper Days in Creighton? I discovered some of those places through dogged exploration. Others were found by accident.

I will share Nebraska adventures like these and many more in *Nebraska Geographic* and look forward to you joining me in this new travel adventure. Ultimately, I hope you will embark on your own explorations of the great state of Nebraska.

Safe travels – and watch for deer.

Alan J. Bartels is a writer, photographer, student of nature, adventurer, wanderer, storyteller, and the author of “100 Things To Do In The Nebraska Sandhills Before You Die.” Reach him at 100ThingsSandhills@gmail.com