

Nebraska Geographic

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Burger Time

I suspect that most of us have our favorites – the cafes, bars, diners, drive-ins, and restaurants that make Nebraska’s best burgers. I have a herd of favorites of my own, depending on where I am traveling within the Cornhusker State, and will share just a flavorful few.

When I am anywhere close to Ogallala at suppertime, I drift into Driftwood. You will know this downtown dining destination by the two-rail fence out front flanked by a row of wooden barrels, and the giant guitar made out of actual driftwood. I appreciate it when restaurants get creative when naming their featured offerings. For what it is worth, I feel the same way about breweries and how they name their brews. Driftwood’s burgers include the Lonesome Dove, a tribute to the late 1980s Western miniseries with a script partially set in Ogallala. My Driftwood fave is the Johnny Carson Late Night. This half-pounder named for the famous Nebraskan talk show host and comedian has the crowd roaring with garlic aioli, applewood bacon, and an over medium egg. Driftwood is also known for its pizzas, and you can’t go wrong with Lake Mac & Cheese. Whatever you order, I suggest washing it down with a local brew from Second Chapter Brewing in Ogallala’s former Goodall City Library building. It is a one-minute walk away.

On the opposite side of the Sandhills, cattycorner from Ogallala, the Four Corners Bar & Grill serves bar food at the intersection of Highways 70 and 281 north of Bartlett. Known for decades as Miller’s Corner, the recently renovated and reopened Four Corners once saved my life. Exploring the Sandhills in the wind driven rain for hours with my camera left me chilled to the bone. I knew that Four Corners had just reopened, so I headed that way and then found a seat at the bar. I felt my body temperature rise as I devoured their Swiss Mushroom Burger. The server did not seem to judge me for following each bite with a swallow of hot coffee. I have heard that the Prime Rib Sandwich is wonderful, and it is on my radar for next time. If you are passing by on a Tuesday, keep going. That is the Four Corners crew’s day off.

Sometimes, after church on Sunday mornings, I head to the Elyria Bar for lunch. Elyria is located in Valley County between Ord and Burwell along Highway 11. If you are not already parked in the center of the gravel street out front when they open at 11:30 on Sunday morning, you might not get your favorite seat (Apparently, I am not the only one who comes here instead of staying for the Sunday church potluck!). Housed in a former bank with the vault used for storage, Elyria Bar is known for its Bank Burger, which is topped with bacon, egg, grilled onions, grilled jalapenos, and cheese. Honestly, I have never tried it. I usually get the ¼-pounder. The half-pounder is about too much for me. Elyria Bar took advantage of the slow times during the pandemic to do a classy renovation. Everyone's favorite bartender, Mikey, is an equal opportunity jokester and will pick on you if he knows you or not. Tip him well!

Also setting up shop in a historic bank building, the Union Bar in Gering is truly home to award-winning burgers. Customers are the real winners since they can order the trio of Union Bar creations that have placed toward the top during the Nebraska State Fair's Best Burger Contest: the Deuce, the Union Burger, and the Diet Burger – which features three patties on a Kaiser bun along with a whopping one full pound of bacon! To wash it down, keep in mind that Union Bar is also a title holder of Nebraska City's Best of the Midwest Bloody Mary Championship.

There are so many more great Nebraska burger joints that could be included in this lineup – we could fill this entire newspaper and then some. But I would be negligently remiss if I didn't mention Bob's Bar.

Lots of diners, drive-ins, and dive bars claim, "you won't leave hungry." At Bob's, it is their philosophy, mission statement, and beefy business plan. This place is truly famous, its big burgers and giant sides making Martinsburg, Nebraska a dining destination for foodies and burger fanatics from across Nebraska and beyond.

The crew from the America's Best Restaurants TV show dropped by Bob's in May. I was last there in April while meeting colleagues for supper and a beer. The place was full of friendly locals, and food tourists (like us) with eyes larger than their stomachs. I knew about the big burgers with patties so large that they exceed the tiny bun and approach the edge of the plate. Seeing the servers shuttle bulging baskets of fries and other sides to tables full of eager diners, I readily agreed when our server suggested the four of us order one side and share it. These sides are measured in pounds. I would have been happy with just fries. The other members of my party wanted to try the tater tots and the cheese balls, too!

Burger master Bob Lamprecht died last July. His legacy of family, community, and taking care of customers lives on in his bar in the northeast corner of Nebraska. Hamburgers are only \$6, cheeseburgers \$6.50. But you'd better bring cash or a check, they do not take plastic.

When you go, order a big burger, a cold Schlitz, and raise a toast to Bob and all of Nebraska's best burgers.

Safe travels – and watch for deer.