

Scenes of Rare Beauty

The fertile valley of the Nile
Is famed in story old;
And the Yukon's turbid waters
Rush across their sands of gold;
But for beauty, find the valley
Where the 'Wapsie' winds its way
Or the lazy Boone flows idly by
In good old Iowa.

The scenery of the highways and byways of Iowa and along the winding rivers is not always remarkably picturesque, yet there is charm in the ever-changing panorama. Now and again there is something that connects the present with the past. Falling Rock at Eldora Pine Creek speaks of geologic ages. There are also many reminders of the pioneers. Pilot Knob is interesting not only because it spent a million years in the distant north, but also because it moved southward to become the real "pilot" which directed the course of many a weary pioneer as he traveled across a trailless, trackless western prairie. Again, there are objects which speak pleasantly of the present — the lotus beds, the white water lilies, and the birds on a thousand boughs. To lovers of nature everywhere,

Iowa affords many scenes of rare beauty, of fascination, and of charm.

As early as the forties David Dale Owen made a geological survey of Iowa, and discovered many areas which, for scientific and aesthetic purposes, he believed should be preserved. One of these places lies along the Iowa River in Hardin County between Eldora and Steamboat Rock, and is now known as Eldora Pine Creek State Park. In this region the Iowa River has cut a deep channel through layers of sandstone and formed heavily wooded ravines, which in earlier years served as hiding places for horse thieves. Indeed, this was the headquarters of that noted band of desperadoes lead by the Rainsbarger brothers. It was in this vicinity, too, that Herbert Quick spent his boyhood and received many of the impressions he described so vividly in *Vandermark's Folly* and *The Hawkeye*.

The country around Falling Rock and Wild Cat Cave is noted for the remarkable variety of boreal plants that grow there. It marks the southwestern limit of the distribution of the white pine in the United States. In the early days fish abounded in every pond and brook, prairie chickens and quail were common, and even deer were not unknown. Attempts are now being made to reestablish these early conditions, and to conserve wild life in natural surroundings like Herbert Quick knew them as a boy.

The largest, most attractive, and best known park

in central Iowa, and one of the most delightful in the entire State is an area of about six hundred acres in Boone County known as the Ledges. Long before the State park movement began, this spot was a favorite haunt of geologists, botanists, and zoologists, as well as of sightseers and picnickers. It is at once a great scientific laboratory and a delightful pleasure resort.

The Ledges State Park extends on both sides of the Des Moines River. Bear Creek — so named because a bear was killed there by early settlers — drains the tract west of the river, and Pease Creek, named in honor of John Pea, an early settler, drains the east side. A half mile above the outlet of Pease Creek is an outcrop of sandstone on both banks forming vertical walls about seventy-five feet high, from the top of which a gentle slope extends about one hundred and twenty feet more to the prairie above.

This area contains a wide variety of ferns and a remarkable collection of northern plants, such as the pale vetch, the juniper moss, and the reindeer lichen. It is a favorite resort for wild animals, and more than a hundred species of birds have been observed there. Prehistoric Indian mounds in this region add further interest. "To spend a day or an hour at the Ledges is a pleasure and leaves sweet memories — but to visit this restful place with the coming and going of the seasons, in sunshine and storm, to learn its secrets and find its hidden treasures, is to love them".

On the boundary line between Hancock and Winnebago counties in north central Iowa is a unique and interesting area known as Pilot Knob State Park. Pilot Knob is a glacial formation, which rises to an altitude of fourteen hundred and fifty feet and is one of the highest points in the State. To the pioneer, the wide prairies — the endless meadows of dark grasses driven in waves before the wind — seem to have given the impression of a boundless sea. Any natural object high and visible to the traveler became a veritable "pilot". Hence the name Pilot Knob.

The region around Pilot Knob was once a favorite Indian resort, and fascinating Indian stories are still current. Near Pilot Knob, nestling high up in the hills, is a tiny little spring-fed lake. Cool and clear, in summer it is decked by water lilies and many forms of northern aquatic vegetation. When the white settlers came to this region and the Indians moved on, a solitary Indian remained to live alone in a neat little cabin beside this tiny lake. Because of disappointment, it was said, he refused to follow his tribesmen. To them he came to be known as the "Dead Man", and the lake was known as Dead Man's Lake.

Pilot Knob was not only a favorite Indian resort and a place of interest to the pioneer. It has a significant present-day appeal. From the top of the Knob spectators may behold a most charming and extensive landscape — "a perfect Garden of Eden lying at their feet

and extending for forty miles in every direction as far as the vision extends, showing to the astonished beholder one of the richest and best improved farming sections to be found anywhere."

The wooded tract surrounding Pilot Knob contains white oak, red northern pin and bur oak, basswood, pig-nut hickory, black walnut, slippery-elm, American elm, and wild crab-apple trees. It has always been a favorite resort for birds and wild game. Once the wild turkey, ruffed grouse, prairie chicken, and even deer were found there. These now are gone, but other birds and wild animals are still numerous. An area of more than two hundred and eighty acres, including this "wonderfully picturesque promontory", was dedicated as Pilot Knob State Park in 1924.

In the extreme northwestern corner of Iowa in Lyon County is a forty-seven acre tract known as Gitchie Manito State Park. This area is noted for its prairie flora, its ancient outcrops of Sioux quartzite, its red pipestone, and the mystic Jasper Pool. Once inside the park area the monotony of the surrounding level prairie instantly disappears. The ridge crossing the park, where the red rocks come to the surface, probably does not rise more than twenty feet above the surrounding plain, "but it is apparently solid red quartzite rock, covered in places by a thin coating of soil in which a few patches of trees have taken root". Near the entrance of the park on the left "low bluffs of rock" may

be seen, and a little farther within the park is a beautiful sparkling body of water known as Jasper Pool.

Until recently — perhaps even yet — the “original prairie grass, the blue stem and the buffalo grass that carpeted the great plains when the Indians and the buffaloes held undisputed sway” was undisturbed. To this neutral spot came the Indians for native red pipe-stone to carve into calumets or peace pipes. Many of these Indian relics may have been carried far away, “for Gitchie Manito is close to the Big Sioux River, a part of the ancient Indian all-water route from the Gulf of Mexico to Hudson Bay.”

Somewhat south of Gitchie Manito at the confluence of the Rock and Big Sioux rivers is another area of one hundred acres designated as Oak Grove State Park. This park, in part, is of rough topography, with small and narrow valleys, fine springs, and exposed clay or shale slopes. In part, it is devoid of vegetation, somewhat resembling the Bad Lands of the Dakotas. The sunny slope of the prairie, however, is covered with beautiful prairie flowers. In the woodlands are sumac, basswood, elm, soft maple, green ash, and the bur oak, which is rare in northwest Iowa.

This area was acquired by the State in 1924 and is “a delight to Nature lovers, as it forms a natural meeting place of prairie, woodland, and imposing rocky bluffs whose steep slopes contain a great variety of native shrub and tree life”. This park is but a few

miles from Hawarden, and is one of the attractive recreational centers of the northwest.

In southwestern Iowa in Fremont County there is a rugged region, which was once held sacred as an Indian council ground. The Indians did not dwell there permanently but now and again they "came in large bodies, chief riding proudly in front, war feathers gay, paints of many hues smeared over brown bodies, while squaws trailed in the rear". There they attended tribal councils, danced the war dance, smoked the pipe of peace or formally buried the hatchet. At these councils, Waubonsie, principal chief of the Pottawatamie, was frequently the leader.

At a later date, pioneer settlers in this region found themselves involved in boundary disputes, and they were not always quite sure whether they lived in Missouri or in Iowa. Indeed, Stephen Cooper of Bartlett in Fremont County once represented Holt County, Missouri, in the Missouri legislature. But the boundary question has long since been settled. Now it is possible to stand on the knolls and peaks of this region and, looking across the boundary lines, view the landscape of four Commonwealths — Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas.

About 1857, Augustus Borchert, a young German, settled in this region and laid out a village which he called Hamburg in honor of Hamburg on the Elbe. Nearly seventy years later a park area of two hundred

acres near this town was set aside. It has since been formally named Waubonsie State Park in honor of the Indian chief who once held this land.

The drifted loess hills in Waubonsie park abound in the flora of the sandy southwest — cactus, yucca, and other such plants being found there. Vegetation thrives on the north and east slopes of these dunes, but the south and west slopes are bare.

On the Middle Coon River in Guthrie County, about equidistant from Guthrie Center, Bagley, Bayard, Yale, and Panora is an attractive park of one hundred and thirty acres known as the King State Park. Oak trees of a wide variety are found there — red oak, white oak, bur oak, timber oak, and the dwarf chestnut oak. The dwarf oak, from three to six feet tall, occurs on the "hogbacks", and in July is usually laden with acorns. It is a secluded place, however, reached only over unimproved country roads.

Other trees are also numerous — the pig-nut hickory, common hickory, slippery-elm, basswood, many fine red haws, American plums, and wild crab-apple trees. The red haws, with their white flowers in spring and the bright red fruit in autumn, give these woods a peculiar charm. Traces of an overland trail used by gold seekers in 1848 add a touch of historic interest to the park.

A beautiful area of almost three hundred acres on the banks of the Raccoon River, near the town of

Commerce in Polk County, has been dedicated as Elbert Tract State Park. This region consists of sandy bottom land and provides delightful beaches upon which youth may bathe and bask in the summer sunlight with pleasure and safety. Many of the trees are of the original forest. Here one finds a large display of black walnut trees, and some of the largest red elms that may be seen anywhere in the State. The park is only a few miles from the city of Des Moines and is rapidly becoming one of the favorite picnic spots for residents of the capital city.

The scenery along the Des Moines River in southern Van Buren County is rugged and picturesque. Near the town of Farmington a small bayou is formed in which there is a great bed of American lotus. In India, Japan, and Egypt the lotus has long been the emblem of purity, and the American lotus is no less beautiful. Springing as it does from the lowliest places, "lifting its golden-hearted white blossom high above the restless reach of the waves that it may open pure and spotless to the sun", it is indeed the "lily of the Gods". An area of one hundred acres, including this bayou of beauty, has been reserved as the Farmington State Park.

The upland area contains a wide variety of trees — red oak, white oak, and bur oak; red-bud elm, slippery elm, and American elm; pig-nut hickory, shellbark hickory, and white hickory; black walnut, butternut,

and basswood. Birds, too, are numerous. A charming trail leads around the lake upon a high ridge, now following closely the water's edge, now high above overlooking the water.

In Henry County a few miles south of Mount Pleasant lies the now almost deserted village of Oakland Mills. Near the site of the village, where the Skunk River flows swiftly to the southward, the surrounding picturesque hills used to resound with the noise of water-wheels. In the sixties a woolen mill with its many spindles furnished labor for factory hands, but by the close of the seventies the machinery had been removed and the building was "spotted with decay". There, too, once stood a flour mill to grind the farmer's grist, but it also has long since vanished. In more recent years a dam has been constructed, an artificial lake formed, and a hydro-electric plant has been built. The old mills with their stories of pioneer days have passed, but there is still charm and romance in the name of Oakland Mills.

In 1920 an area of one hundred and ten acres was acquired and given the name Oakland Mills State Park. The park land is broken by gulches and has attractive outcrops of limestone. Oakland Mills State Park is not only a delightful recreational center but a valued botanical and zoological laboratory as well — a laboratory available to all, for the Department of Botany at Iowa Wesleyan College has labeled plainly the differ-

ent kinds of trees and shrubs and plants so that he who runs may read.

The region near the mouth of the Flint River in Des Moines County is one of historic interest and of natural beauty. As early as 1808 a trading post was established there by the American Fur Company, and a thriving business was carried on with the Indians. Twenty-four years later white settlers began to arrive and a town soon sprang up. The Indians called it Sho-ko-kon but, on account of the many flint arrowheads found there, the name Flint Hills came into common usage. This name was later changed to Burlington, however, and the pioneer settlement eventually became the Territorial capital of Wisconsin and of Iowa.

About a mile north of West Burlington is a wooded tract which descends to the banks of the Flint River. This area contains a wide variety of plants and an abundance of excellent spring water. It is known, too, for the caves in the stone outcrops — particularly for the peculiar features of Starr's Cave. Attractive, unique, and interesting, this cave has long been a "playground for the Burlingtonians" — the Mecca of countless pilgrimages of adventure, and an ideal picnic rendezvous.

In 1925, an area of one hundred acres was secured by the State and dedicated as Flint Hills State Park. While Starr's Cave is not included in the park, it is

in an adjacent ravine. The park lies almost wholly on the high ridge between two valleys. The bluffs are heavily wooded.

Benjamin Nye and other redoubtable pioneers came from Vermont in 1833 and settled in the rugged country at the mouth of Pine Creek in Muscatine County. Presently a store was opened for the sale of coffee, sugar, molasses, salt, pork, and whisky; and a post office was established. Letters came addressed to "Iowa Post Office, Black Hawk Purchase, Wisconsin Territory". The New England settlers, however, seem not to have liked the name Iowa for their village, for the name of the post office was soon changed to Montpelier.

Pine Creek is a racing, rippling stream, admirably adapted to the use of the water-wheel. Along its wooded embankments Mr. Nye, it is said, built three grist mills, one of which still stands, although its wheels have ceased to turn, and its sturdy timbers have grown mossy green and spotted with decay.

The town of Montpelier never became more than a mere hamlet and the few buildings which were once there have long since disappeared. The precipitous cliffs, vine-clad ledges, and great canyons overhung with towering hickory, elm, maple, and oak trees, the numerous and varied wild flowers and ferns, and the birds and wild animals everywhere present make this a place of rare beauty and unusual interest to lovers

of nature. In recent years an area of more than two hundred acres, including Horeshoe Bend, Steamboat Rock, Flat Iron Rock, Lovers' Lane, and the site of the old rustic mill, has been obtained by the State as a park and a wild life preserve. To this area, by the will of the Brandt sisters, owners of the loveliest of these woods, is now being added a tract of seventy acres of timber land including their own homestead. Efforts are being made to acquire an additional one hundred and twenty acres of adjacent woodland. This park area is widely known as one of Iowa's most picturesque spots — Wild Cat Den State Park.

Jones County in pioneer days has been referred to as "A Realm of Paradise". An early settler declared that wild geese, ducks, and pigeons were there "by the millions", while prairie chickens and quail were "innumerable". He lamented that these now are gone and suggested that there is little to compensate for the "superb, unequaled, near-to-nature delights and experiences of the huntsmen and the fishermen who made this veritable paradise their home in the days of the early pioneers".

Fortunately, however, there is an area along the banks of the Wapsipinicon River, near the city of Anamosa, where the "Big Woods" have been conserved and where the "superb, unequaled, near-to-nature delights and experiences" may still be enjoyed. Rugged cliffs there are to scale, rustic and romantic features —

caves, ledges, and dens — to explore. There are also modern recreational facilities — golf links, tennis courts, a ball park, and a swimming pool. Commercial vandalism has not destroyed all. Rather, naturalists and public minded citizens have collaborated to conserve and develop some of nature's gifts. Wapsipinicon State Park, now, as in days of yore, might well be referred to as "A Realm of Paradise".

When Joshua Bear and David Scott settled in Jackson County in the early thirties their food supply depended largely upon their rifles and the chase. In hunting seasons they would frequently go out together for a ten-day's hunt. On one occasion they went directly to the heavy timber along the Maquoketa River knowing that the deer would seek shelter from the heavy snow storm. There they hunted until nearly sundown, "having hung up some five or six deer during the day". At evening they started up a ravine that led from the river and soon struck the trail of ten or a dozen deer. The bluffs on either side were too steep for the deer to ascend. Looking ahead the hunters noticed that the ravine seemed to terminate in what appeared to be a great bridge of rock. They were delighted, for they thought they had their game in a death trap. But suddenly to their surprise the deer "disappeared as completely as if the ground had opened up and swallowed them". They had taken refuge in a great limestone cave.

When first discovered the ceiling of these caves were hung with "most beautiful stalactites", and upon the floor corresponding stalagmites — the slow deposits of centuries — arose to meet their companions above. Some of the stalactites were from two to three feet in length, and scarcely more than a half inch in diameter at the base. Some were hollow like pipe-stems and not much thicker, the water filtering down through the openings in the center. Most of them were translucent, almost transparent. Others were of a dull muddy color. Avidity for relics has robbed the caves of their rarest beauty, yet much of the unique, attractive, and fascinating formation remains in the Maquoketa limestone caves.

Near the caves is a natural bridge, another phenomenal work of nature. In describing this bridge, James H. Lees declares that "enthusiasm, however exuberant, is entirely pardonable". It is, of course, not comparable in dimensions with the immense natural bridges of Utah. But in point of "massive architectural beauty, the coloration of the rock and the crown of foliage which covers its summit . . . Iowa's natural bridge surely excels those of the barren west. The top of the arch is flat, perhaps forty or fifty feet above the floor of the valley and bears upon its back several large trees, besides a complete covering of smaller vegetation. The arch itself rises twenty feet or so above the base and is twenty or thirty feet thick."

The limestone caves and the natural bridge make Maquoketa State Park a most delightful resort. But there are other charming features. The whole area is carpeted with hepaticas in early spring, while in the autumn the many hard maples and small evergreens make gorgeous color contrasts.

The city of Bellevue, with its picturesque setting and beautiful surroundings, has character all its own. Situated upon a beautiful plateau and surrounded by an amphitheater of hills which protects it from the chilly blasts of the winter wind and lends enchantment to the romantic adventures of youth in springtime, it is, indeed, a place of rare beauty. On either side of the city are high bluffs which afford a superb view of the river, its wooded islands, the near-by sand dunes, and the rugged woodlands on both sides of the Father of Waters. The river bank for more than a mile along the water's edge has been cleared of buildings and is cared for as a park, offering a marvelous view of the majestic Mississippi rolling down to the sea.

White settlers began to arrive in this region in 1833 and the town Bellevue — first called Belleview — was incorporated three years later. During the early years of its history the town was infested with thieves and desperadoes. These continued to operate until their nefarious grip was broken in 1840 by the Bellevue War.

From 1837 to 1841 and again from 1848 to 1861, Bellevue was the county seat of Jackson County. With

the development of the State park movement in recent years citizens of Bellevue became interested in conserving one of nature's beauty spots and preserving its history. Accordingly, a beautiful park area of one hundred and forty-eight acres on the heights overlooking the Mississippi was set aside as the Bellevue State Park.

Scientists have frequently vied with each other in describing the remarkable bit of topography located in Delaware County and widely known as the "Backbone" — formerly called the "Devil's Backbone". This noted ridge has a higher altitude than the surrounding country. During the glacial period it stood up "like an island in the midst of an ocean of ice". It was not covered by the Iowan drift and is therefore a relic of the far distant past — an area of the "oldland" upon which "ten thousand of centuries have gazed". In 1922 an area of nearly thirteen hundred acres in this region was dedicated as Backbone State Park.

The "backbone" is a long, narrow, limestone ridge, around which the Maquoketa River forms a loop. As one enters from the north, looking to the right, he sees the Maquoketa flowing southward, and as he looks to the left, behold there is the same stream flowing northward. The summit of the ridge rises sometimes a hundred and forty feet above the river. In places the sides are precipitous, rising sheer upward for a hundred feet. The exposed surfaces are frequently carved into "picturesque columns, towers, castles, battlements and fly-

ing buttresses". This rugged area has long been known as a picnic ground and a summer resort, and many are the youths who have strolled down "Lovers' Walk" and climbed the "Devil's Stairway".

Aside from the areas which have been dedicated as State parks, Iowa is rich in gifts of nature and in areas of scenic beauty. Alonzo J. Berkley Park Preserve — a rugged forty-acre tract, eight miles northwest of Boone, heavily wooded but inaccessible by highway — has been given to the State and set aside as a refuge for wild life, for the preservation of native flora, and for scientific research. Wood Thrush Park Preserve, an area of twenty-six acres in Jefferson County, near the town of Lockridge; Woodman Hollow, consisting of thirty-five acres in Webster County; and a small area known as Pillsbury Point bordering on the high bank of West Lake Okoboji near Arnold's Park are other wild life preserves.

The regions around Lake Okoboji and Spirit Lake are profuse with rare gifts of nature and are the scenes of many pleasure resorts. The varied topography, the forest and prairie flora, and the wide variety of "habitat conditions" make this a paradise of wild life and an ideal place for scientific research. There naturalists may study natural objects in their natural surroundings. There "the fungus starts in the forest shade, the wings of bird or insect fan the sunny air, or the fossil speaks its significance from the stony pages of the riven quarry

stone." To the scientist this is one of the most fascinating and fruitful regions, but as yet no State park has been established on the shores of Iowa's largest lakes.

As a region of universal charm the area around McGregor in northeastern Iowa stands out with especial clearness. So interesting and attractive is this section of the State that it has come to be widely known as the "Switzerland of Iowa", and it is being considered as the site of a national park. James H. Lees, comments particularly on the Pictured Rocks, about a mile below McGregor, which "are an unusual phenomenon even in this land of the unusual. A hundred feet or more of St. Peter sandstone, stained with all the browns and reds and yellows and purples of the iron oxides, in contrast with the translucent white of the pure sand, form cliffs and grottoes and nooks of marvelous colors and patterns, set off by groves and lanes of shady trees."

The scenery of Iowa is not all remarkably picturesque. But here and there throughout the State are panoramic scenes of rare beauty. Iowans may visit foreign climes where sea and sky, mountain and plain, lake and river contrive to make havens of rest. But if they visit the park regions of their native State they may find a restfulness, a calm and serene quietude, a beauty and grandeur quite comparable to that which they seek afar. To spend a day or an hour at such a resort is a pleasure which leaves sweet memories. But to visit it again and again with the coming and the

going of the seasons, in sunshine and storm, to learn its secrets and find its hidden treasures is to love it as one loves a friend.

J. A. SWISHER