

# THE IOWAN

## Life on the Mississippi

Richard Bissell, Iowa's version of Mark Twain

## Maquoketa Caves

A wintry stroll through one of Iowa's natural wonders

## Borderlines

How Iowa's state and county boundaries were drawn

NOV/DEC 2017 • \$6.95



0 300319 0


DISPLAY UNTIL 12/31

[iowan.com](http://iowan.com)


# MAQUOKETA CAVES

A winter stroll through one of Iowa's natural wonders

Text and Photography by Brian Abeling



During the winter months, the lighted walkway in Dancehall Cave is turned off because the brown bats are hibernating. Be sure to check with the state park officials before entering — the caves are sometimes closed to help prevent the spread of white nose syndrome from humans to the bats. I took this photo with a tripod, and I set a 30-second-exposure photo that captured my flashlight as I walked toward the back of the cave.



Although I've visited Maquoketa Caves many times, this was the first time I had visited during the winter, and I was fortunate to have a fresh snowfall from the night before. Although I wasn't the first person in the park that day, I was there by myself for many hours, giving me the opportunity to make fresh tracks as I explored the trails around the park. The only noise was the sounds of my boots crunching through the snow (and those sounds echoing off the limestone bluff). When I stopped, it became completely silent — perhaps the quietest place I've been in Iowa.

*USA Today* Readers' Choice poll selected the Maquoketa Caves State Park as the top attraction in Iowa for 2017. Of course, most of the more than 150,000 annual visitors come during spring, summer, and fall. Winter is a great time to visit, though, especially after it snows. This is the long winding staircase that leads to Dancehall Cave, the largest of the caves, which spans more than 800 feet across. That's me in the photo, and I took it using a tripod and remote trigger.





Lower Dancehall Cave has a huge opening where outside-air rushes in to mix with the relatively warm air from the cave. That creates zones where icicles can form. On this trip, I saw thousands of icicles, ranging in length from less than inch to 6 feet! ■