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LOOKING FOR AMERICA

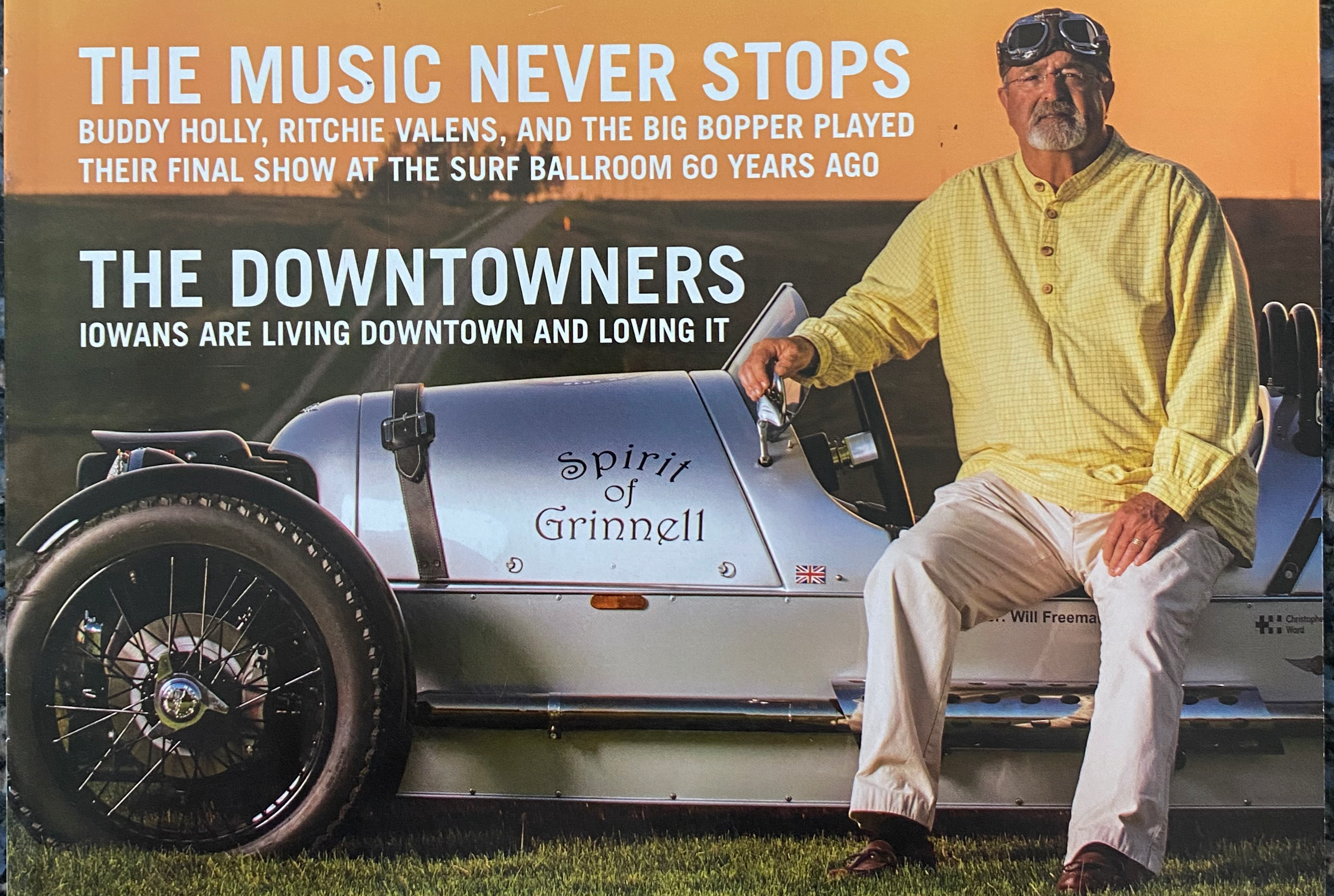
AN IOWA COLLEGE PROFESSOR DROVE ACROSS THE COUNTRY TO MEET PEOPLE AND COLLECT STORIES

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SUN AND SNOW AT LEDGES

A few miles south of Boone, one of Iowa's first state parks beckons visitors to hike its snow-covered landscape

Photography and Text by Brian Abeling

I've been to Ledges State Park many times before, but I wanted to experience it in the winter, right after a fresh snowfall. These photos were taken on a trip to Ledges in February 2018. It was one of those days when looks are deceiving — the sun was out and the skies were a vibrant blue, but the temperature barely broke into the double digits.

I knew the Canyon Drive would be closed (it typically is during the winter months), so I drove to the western edge of the park where Pea's Creek empties into the Des Moines River. From there, I hiked up the frozen creek up into the park. I only passed a few other hikers and few cross-country skiers, as it was still early morning. Although it was bitterly cold, it was my chance to make tracks through the fresh snow, as sections of the park had not been touched yet by other hikers.

When you walk through the canyon, you expect to see interesting patterns where the snow has landed on the bridges and picnic tables, but what you don't expect is the incredible silence. Not only does the snow act as a sound absorber, but the canyon also seems to help isolate any noise from the surrounding prairie. When you stand still, the silence is just amazing.

Learn more at iowadnr.gov.

A fresh layer of snow on the stone arch bridge in Ledges State Park.



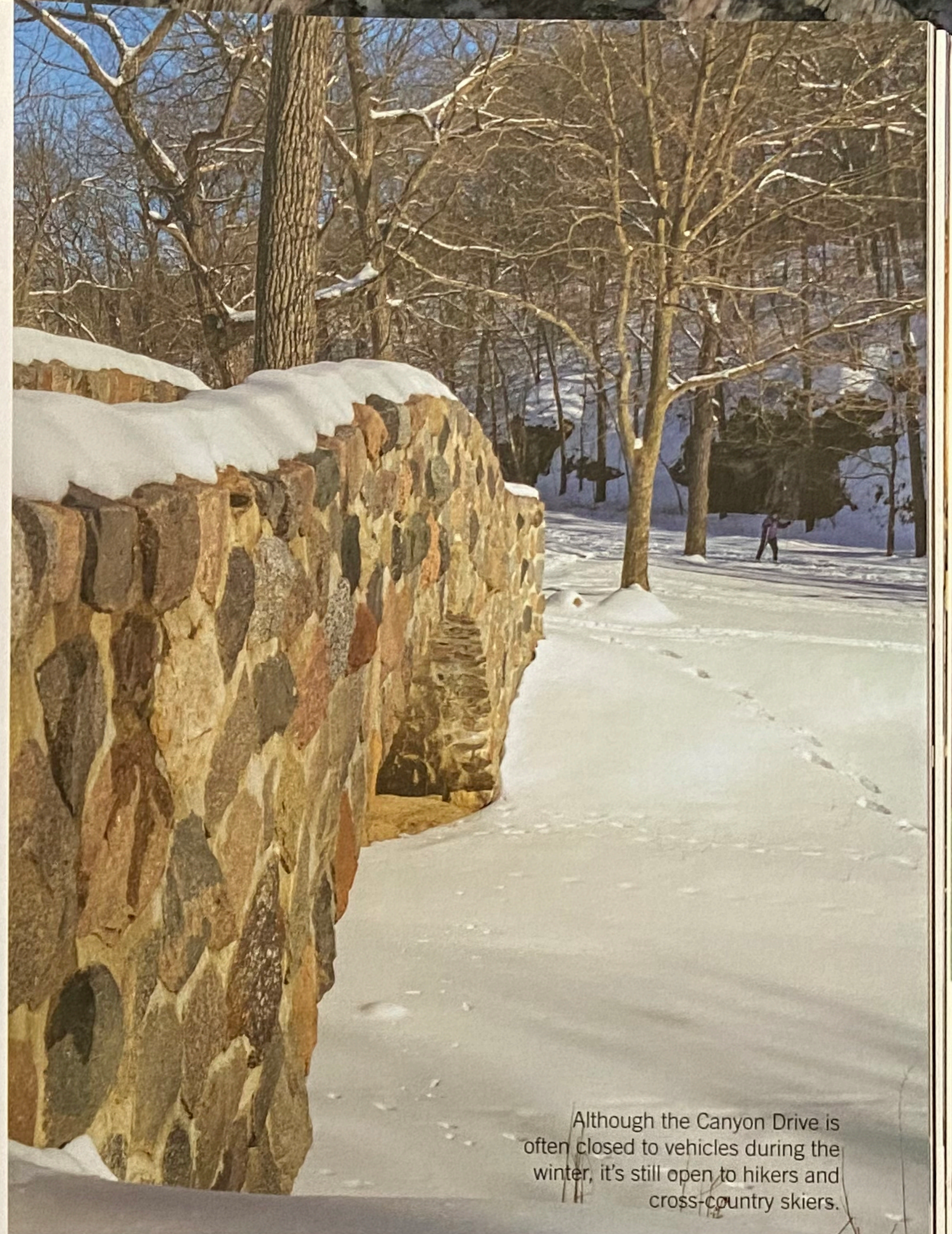
When Pea's Creek freezes over, the creek becomes a path for cross-country skiers to enter the park.



I enjoyed getting to the park early on this winter morning, as it allowed me to be the first to make tracks through sections of the park.



▲ These sandstones cliffs are where the name Ledges comes from, as the cliffs can be as high as 100 feet above the canyon floor.



Although the Canyon Drive is often closed to vehicles during the winter, it's still open to hikers and cross-country skiers.

Perhaps the most recognized feature (besides the ledges themselves) is the stone arch bridge, which was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. ▶



An aerial view of Ledges State Park reveals the path of Pea's Creek that runs into the Des Moines River. The area was carved out of sandstone around 13,000 years ago.

