

# THE IOWAN

## IOWA AUTUMN ADVENTURES

3 RIVER ROUTES YOU CAN DRIVE

FALL COLOR TRANSFORMS  
YELLOW RIVER STATE FOREST  
IN NORTHEAST IOWA

TEACHING TOLERANCE  
AT THE SIOUX CITY  
RAILROAD MUSEUM

HOUSEPLANT SHOP  
IN AMES IS BLOOMING  
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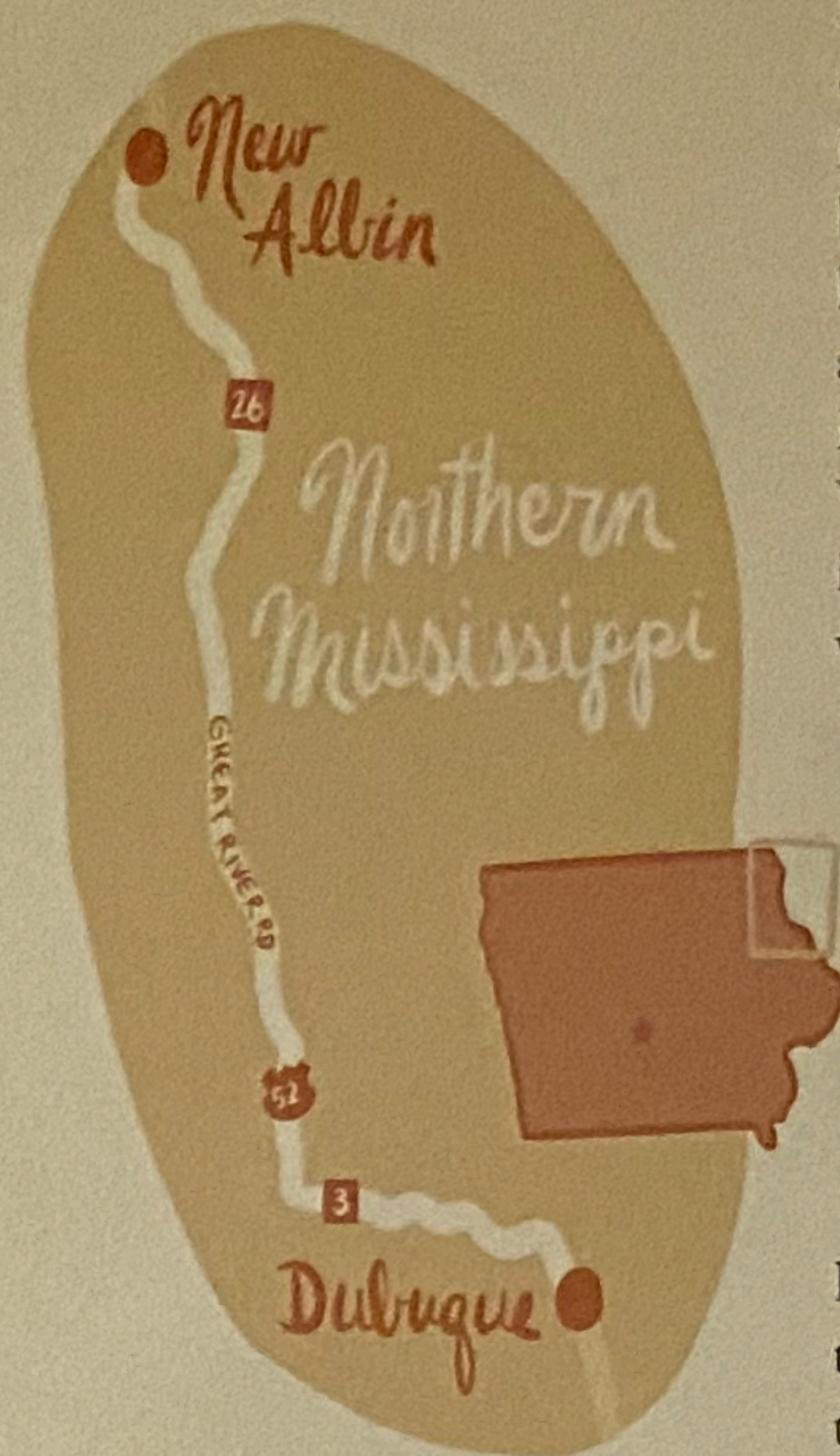
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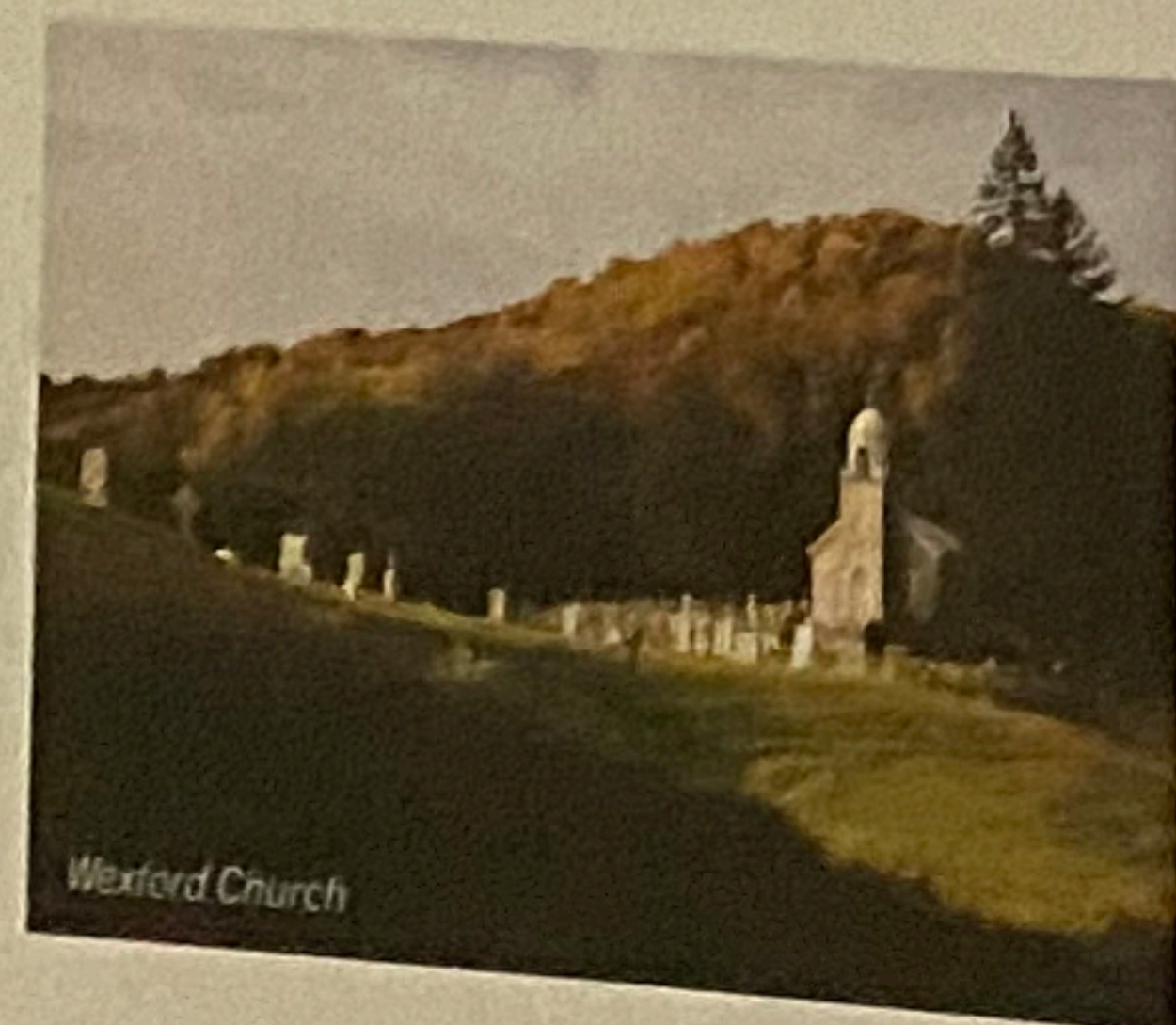


# Route 1 NEW ALBIN to DUBUQUE

DISTANCE: 100 miles



Considered a potential candidate for national park in the early 1900s, the upper Mississippi River region continues to lure visitors with natural beauty, historic towns, wooded parks peaking with fall color in mid-October, plus beer tours on foot. Though the distance is short (aka less gas money), you'll find numerous ways to explore the area for a complete weekend.



Westford Church

Starting in the very northeast corner of the state, our perfect fall trip starts in **New Albin** for snacks. Plan on bringing a cooler to stock up on hickory smoked bacon, spicy jerky, and other smoked treats at City Meat Market, the state's oldest smokehouse. While the specialty is meats, the intimate shop also stocks beers and wine, hot sauces, pickled eggs, plus other tasty to-go snacks.

Just 15 minutes downriver is **Lansing**, surrounded by wooded limestone bluffs towering over the river. For a birds-eye view of the Mississippi and its various channels, cruise across the iconic Black Hawk Bridge, which dates to 1931. After a quick stop across the river in Wisconsin, backtrack to Lansing for lunch and downtown shopping. For riverfront dining (burgers, sandwiches, cold brews), Shep's Riverside Bar & Grill is a favorite destination for tourists; you're sure to see motorcycles parked out front. Weekend specials include a cod dinner on Friday and prime rib on Saturday nights. Coffee on the River is another local business to soak up the Mississippi views with a cup of the daily brew.

Elsewhere in town, find thin-crust pizza and craft beers at the Safe House Saloon on Main Street. Cozy up in one of the curtained booths or relax at the old-school bar at this eatery also known for wings and onion rings. For a one-of-a-kind shopping experience, peruse the narrow aisles at

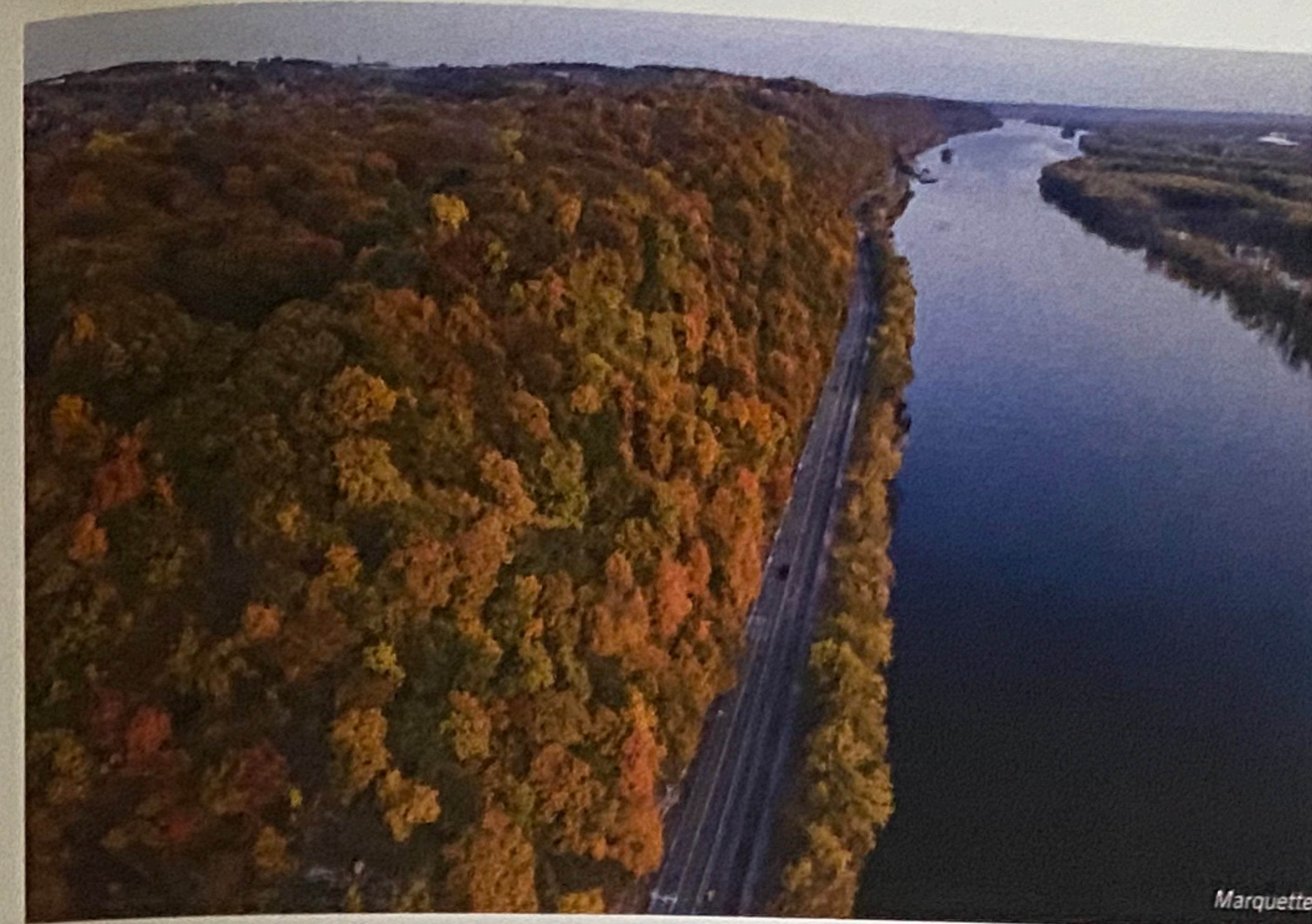
Horsfall's Lansing Variety store for all sorts of affordable and perhaps unnecessary goods and gifts. The shelves are stocked high with puzzles, toys, kitchen gear, tea towels ... a little of everything. Those who lean claustrophobic might want to shop other Main Street businesses or people-watch outside.

After you've had your fill in Lansing, head south to **Harper's Ferry**, where you'll find a variety of vacation rentals and the area's nearby parks. Yellow River State Forest, Effigy Mounds National Monument, and Pikes Peak State Park—all within a 30-minute drive—offer over multiple miles of hiking trails, plus numerous Native American mounds.



Pikes Peak State Park

All parks are free access, and each has its perks. At Yellow River Forest, find backpacking sites to get off the grid, fly-fishing for rainbow and brook trout, kayaking on the 35-mile Yellow River water trail, 50 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails, plus traditional campgrounds for epic fall cookouts. At Effigy Mounds, do a deep dive into the area's Native culture by exploring the animal-shaped mounds on foot. Learn about the



Marquette

area's history at the visitors' center before embarking on the trails to see mounds such as the Little and Big Bear Mound Groups. Plus, there are several scenic Mississippi River overlooks. Further south, Pikes Peak State Park is a favorite Department of Natural Resources site, with more overlooks of the river, boardwalk trails, and picnic areas (the campground is currently closed for renovations).

The nearby towns of **Marquette** and **McGregor** offer ideal options for dining, shopping, and overnights. The historic towns are just 5 minutes apart, so plan time to explore both. Find wineries (Eagles Landing in Marquette), breweries (Old Man River Restaurant & Brewery in McGregor), antiques and gift shops, plus a variety of casual eateries, some with outdoor seating. Located outside of town west on Highway 18, White Springs Supper Club serves burgers, sandwiches, plus chicken, fish, and ribeye dinners. It's a perfect final destination before embarking south to **Guttenberg**.

After the 19-mile drive from McGregor, the Clayton County town of about 1,700 offers views of Lock & Dam 10 plus a perfect slice of fruit pie or chicken salad sandwich

at Picket Fence Café & Catering. For on-the-water views, rent a pontoon boat or 16-foot craft from [gutenbergboatrental.com](http://gutenbergboatrental.com).

Finish up the weekend in **Dubuque**, about an hour to the southeast. The state's oldest town buzzes with activity and options, including numerous restaurants and bars, museums, shops, plus more outdoor experiences.



Hotel Julien

For those looking for a high-flying adventure through the colorful trees, book a trip through Sky Tours at YMCA Union Park Camp. The two-hour trip starts out easy on the Bunny run, with the zips growing in length, including a landing at Lookout Tower, 45 feet aboveground. Soak in the views of the bluffs and valley below before moving to more fast, fun routes, including the Duel, a double zip that spans 800 feet—that's three football fields.

After exploring the air, head downtown for a stay at Hotel Julien **Dubuque**, a historic vacation rental or bed-and-breakfast, or the Grand Harbor Resort and Waterpark if you're traveling with kids. All are walkable to top destinations including the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, the Fenelon Place Elevator (the world's shortest, steepest scenic railway) or perhaps a day cruise on the Mississippi through Riverboat Twilight (available Oct. 28–30).

Dining options abound to suit your mood. With a focus on fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients, Brazen Open Kitchen Bar dishes house-made pastas, Iowa ribeye, and smoked trout. Sample more local goodness at Covivium Urban Farmstead, a nonprofit with gardens and a restaurant serving breakfast and lunch, including a Better Burger topped with house-made tomato jam (there's a vegan version, too).

Beer fans find plenty to love here for a walkable brew tour. Start at Backpacket Dubuque, a woody space with games, an expansive bar, and the company's popular beers. Nearby, Dimensional Brewing Company serves wheats, ales, sours, and IPAs from its downtown location. 7 Hills Brewing Co. is another nearby destination dishing pub grub and beers including Purple Reign, a tart sour, and Magic Mullet, a hazy IPA. Before retiring for the night, pull up a seat at the bar at Jubeck New World Brewing to savor one last IPA, ale, or wheat brew.



7 Hills Brewing Co.



# Route 2 CHARLES CITY to CEDAR RAPIDS

DISTANCE: 123 miles

Getting out on the Iowa River tributary is one of the highlights of this trip through northeast and eastern Iowa, as is independent shopping, dining, beer-drinking, and digging into local history and culture.

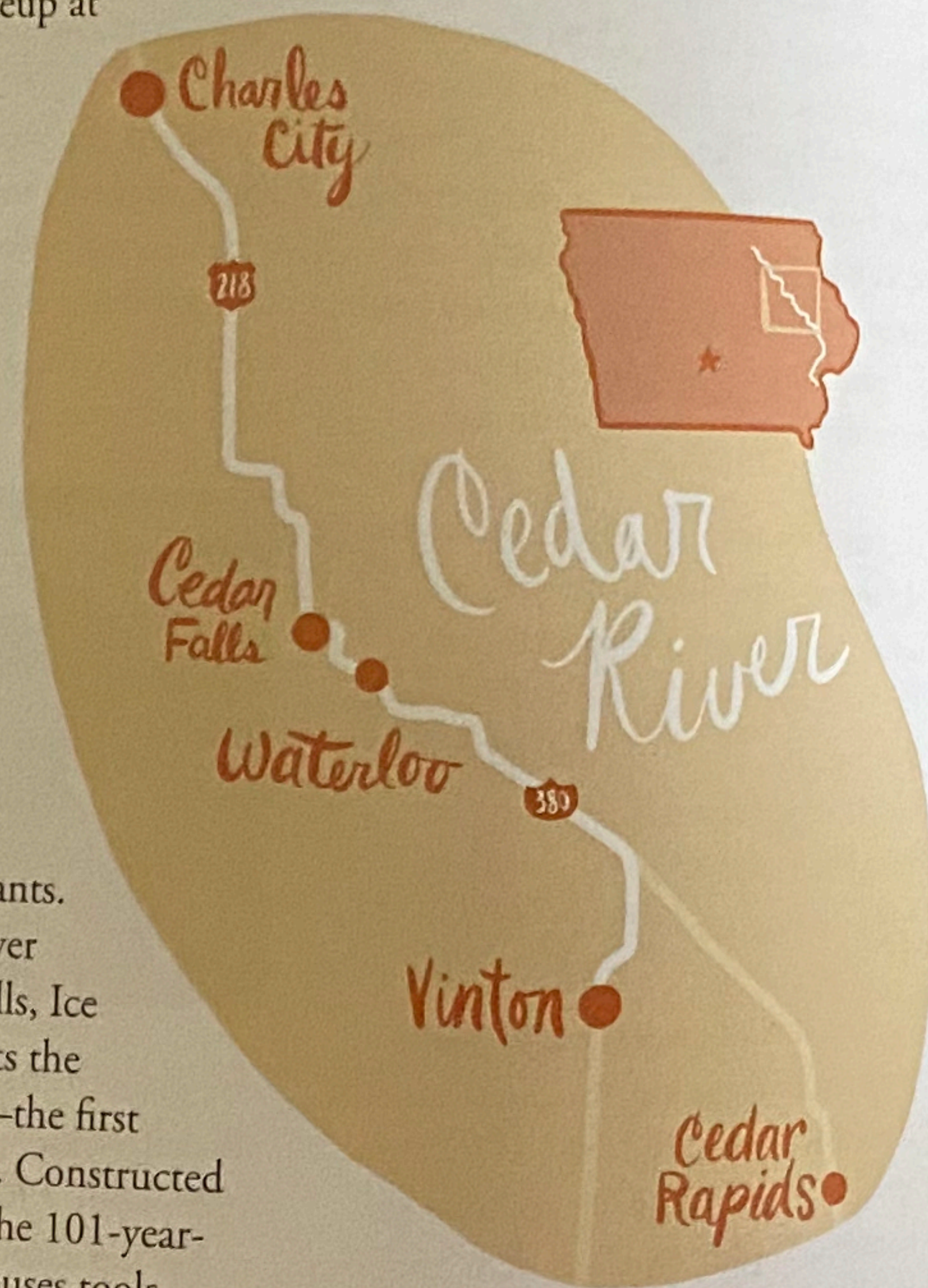
With the Cedar River running right through town, **Charles City** embraces its waterway. In fact, the state's first whitewater park is sited in the heart of downtown. It's a hub for kayakers, paddleboarders, tubers, and anglers and hosts annual events such as the Iowa Games and the Charles City Challenge, both in June. For a prime spot to watch the paddlers, grab a table at The Pub on the Cedar, which serves a variety of area craft beers and comfort cuisine such as pork tenderloins or French dip sandwiches. Nearby, Tellurian Brewing is a bright spot on the river thanks to the vibrant geometric interior mural. Order a bunch of 5-ounce samples of brews such as Apricot-Mango Hefeweizen or Raspberry Sour for just \$3 to sip outside before shopping for canned-to-go beers or trucker hats for trip souvenirs.

Heading south, the small town of **Nashua** offers a divine roadside attraction, the Little Brown Church in the Vale. Constructed in 1855, it's a popular spot for weddings and is visited by people from all over the world. After stopping for a quick tour (reserve in advance; visit [littlebrownchurch.org](http://littlebrownchurch.org)), drive the quick 20 miles to **Waverly**, home to Wartburg College and Main

Street thriving with local businesses. Shoppers looking to purchase watercraft should stop by **CrawDaddy Outdoors**, which offers two stories of high-quality outdoor goods. The business rents kayaks and canoes for those looking to get out on the water (note the business does not provide shuttle services). Elsewhere downtown, find vegan, cruelty-free skincare and makeup at **Root** before stopping by **Bremer Brewing Company** for a wheat or red ale with a flatbread or **Z's Pizza & Diner** for brisket pizza or breaded fried chicken.

Another quick jaunt south is **Cedar Falls** and **Waterloo**, with both cities offering convenient overnight options, plus plenty of local shops and restaurants. Located right on the river in downtown Cedar Falls, **Ice House Museum** presents the story of harvesting ice—the first refrigeration in the area. Constructed to hold 16 tons of ice, the 101-year-old circular structure houses tools used to cut the material from the river nearby. It's open through mid-October. For more history, stop by the **Victorian House Museum** located in an 1863 Italianate style home, which displays everyday items from the late 19th century.

For paddlers wanting to get out on the river, the **Cedar Valley Paddlers' Trail** offers 10 miles on the Cedar River and the various lakes in **George Wyth State Park** and **Hartman Reserve Nature Center**. Paddlers can choose to either float through the main loop, paddle from lake to lake, or try any of the smaller loops. Find boats through **Maxx Rentals**.



Local dining and shopping are prevalent in both towns. Backed by one of the Cedar's channels, **Cedar Falls Brown Bottle** has been an institution for four decades, serving reliably tasty Italian fare such as lasagna, bread salad, and thin-crust pizza. Find a second **Brown Bottle** in downtown Waterloo



just a block from the river. The fare is similar, but the environments are decidedly different, with the Cedar Falls site more casual and modern and downtown Waterloo clubby and librarylike (it's located in the Historical **Russell Lamson Building** dating to 1913). Find additional dining on both sides of the river in Waterloo and throughout Main Street in Cedar Falls.

While it's possible to zip directly to Cedar Rapids, we like following the river to **Vinton**, about 45 miles away. It's home to the stately **Benton County Courthouse**, a 1906 structure on the National Register of Historic Places. After snapping photos of the courthouse, stroll around downtown looking for painted corn statues, including **Old Cedar River**, and murals coloring numerous downtown buildings. If time allows, catch a viewing at the **Palace Theatre**, which

opened in 1915 and showcases classic Art Deco signage.

Just 35 miles away, **Cedar Rapids** serves up more art, culture, and history, plus diverse dining. Start your trip in the heart of the action at **NewBo City Market**, just a few blocks from the river. Check out the local vendors for to-go bites and gifts or sit-down eats from the likes of **Hangry Lady** (healthy and flavorful), the **Full Bowl** (rice and beans), and **Grandma's Root Cellar** (innovating wraps such as an Indian-spiced option).

After a market visit, stop by some of the city's museums—the **African American Museum of Iowa** presents the history of Blacks in the state, highlighting the Civil War, Underground Railroad, the Civil Rights Movement, and historic Black communities.

For a deep dive into all things **Grant Wood**, plan on stopping by the **Grant Wood Studio and Visitor Center** and **Cedar Rapids Museum of Art** to study the works of the Eastern Iowa icon. For works by recent artists, including the new-in-2022 "Fragments" mural, visit [crrmurals.com](http://crrmurals.com) to see recent installations throughout town. They're perfect photos for your social feed.

And for more local art on the plate, you'll find numerous discoveries. **Cobble Hill Restaurant**, a former **James Beard** nominee, sources fresh, local ingredients in its menu focused on new American cuisine, while **Vivian's Soul Food** dishes Southern favorites like red beans and rice, fried chicken, and collard greens. Elsewhere find all sorts of ethnic eats, breweries, and more to finish up your weekend on a filling note.



Route 3

# SIoux CITY to COUNCIL BLUFFS

DISTANCE: 94 miles + detours

Immerse yourself in Lewis & Clark and area Native American history, the Loess Hills, art, and agrotourism on this route on the state's western spine.

The Missouri River ribbons through **Sioux City**. The city of 82,500 is having a bit of a moment, boasting a new boutique hotel complete with fine dining, a spa, and bowling alley (the Warrior Hotel), plus a vibrant farmers market on Wednesday and Saturday mornings and multiple museums highlighting area history and the arts. Plan on an overnight in one of the hotels near the Missouri river so you can get out bright and early to see the city's numerous attractions and the Loess Hills beyond.



Preparation Canyon State Park

The area was first discovered by Europeans during the Lewis & Clark expedition in 1804, and the city pays homage to the explorers and the only traveler to die on the storied journey, Sergeant Charles Floyd. Learn more about the Native peoples (including games the Lakota played) and the expedition in this area through exhibits at the Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, sited right by the river. See a replica of the 55-foot-long vessel used on the trip while watching an intro video inside the Keelboat Theater. Next, walk the short path to Sergeant Floyd River Museum and Welcome Center, a museum inside the retired M.V. Sergeant Floyd, a boat once used by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Chat with local staff about their tourism tips and learn about the history of transportation on the river through photos, artifacts, and dioramas.

Located downtown, the Sioux City Art Museum is a modern gem with 13 outdoor sculptures decorating the grassy campus, a labyrinth on the main level, and exhibits by regional makers. Make sure to see the Corn Room mural by Grant Wood, a

golden tone-on-tone work that once graced an area hotel. After art education, learn more about the local culture and history at the Sioux City Public Museum. Of particular interest is the Native American beadwork, including intricately detailed moccasins, saddle blankets, bandolier bags, and knife sheaths.

Stroll around downtown to see more public sculptures and grab coffee and lunch before hitting the road. Inside the Hard Rock Hotel downtown, order pub fare at Fuel American Grill or filet mignon with herb butter at Main + Abbey. Or try one of the independent eateries and drinking in the Fourth Street Historic District, including Marto Brewing Co. (Neapolitan pizzas and wood-fired pizza with a barrel-aged stout), Soho Kitchen and Bar (supersize salads and handmade bowls), and The Marquee (craft beers and live tunes).



After clocking out of Sioux City, decide if you're up for a quick detour north to view bison and the

golden Loess Hills at Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve operated by the Nature Conservancy. The preserve is home to more than 200 bison and is the largest continuous prairie in the state. While there are no trails, it's possible to see the animals from Highway 12 and some of the side roads. Hikers can find trails at Five Ridge Prairie Park Preserve nearby, a hilly park with loop hikes.

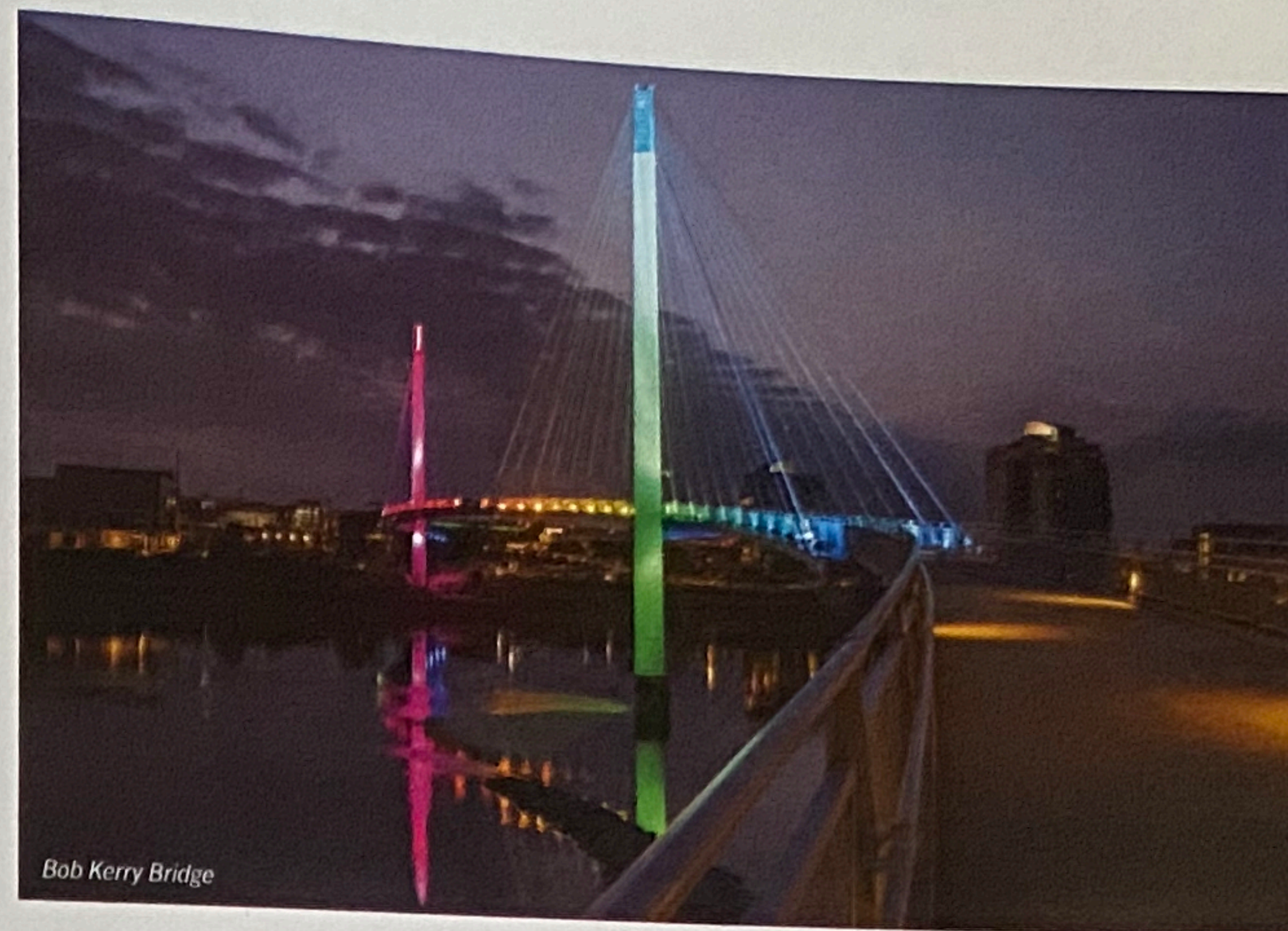
Heading southeast out of Sioux City, Sergeant Floyd Monument towers over the location where Floyd died, most likely from an appendix rupture. The 100-foot obelisk made of sandstone is the first National Registered Historic Landmark in the United States.

Experience more sites where the explorers once visited at Lewis and Clark State Park in **Onawa**, about 40 minutes away. The visitors' center features a full-size keelboat replica (the corp used the vessel to haul gear upriver), historic vessels, and signage with information about the route up the Missouri and a timeline of events. Plus, the DNR-operated site has amenities including lakeside camping, fishing, and boating.

The trip south leads to more nature-based experiences in the Loess Hills,



Murray Hill



Bob Kerrey Bridge

and fall is prime time for hiking and soaking in the views of the geological gem. There are several loops on the Loess Hills Scenic Byway in the area to get off the beaten path. Download a guide at [visitloesshills.org](http://visitloesshills.org). One quick detour is the Preparation Loop, a 15-mile drive that includes Preparation Canyon State Park, which hikers love for backcountry camping under the stars. It's also a great picnic or cookout destination.

For more Loess Hills scenery, detour to the Fountainbleu Loop, a 30-minute drive that includes the overlook at Murray Hill, one of the best views in the area. Keep south toward **Missouri Valley** to pick apples or buy pie at Small's Fruit Farm, learn about lavender at Loess Hills Lavender Farm, or buy aronia berry wine and other berry-based foods at Sawmill Hollow Family Farm. Find several low-key lunch options in town, as well.

Before retiring to **Council Bluffs**, make one more stop at Hitchcock Nature Center to get insights into raptors. From now through the end of December, birders can count hawks, eagles, and other raptors from a 45-foot perch as part of Hawkwatch. It's one of the top 25 viewing stations in

the country. There's also more hiking, camping, cabins, and a lodge with a gift shop and interpretive center.

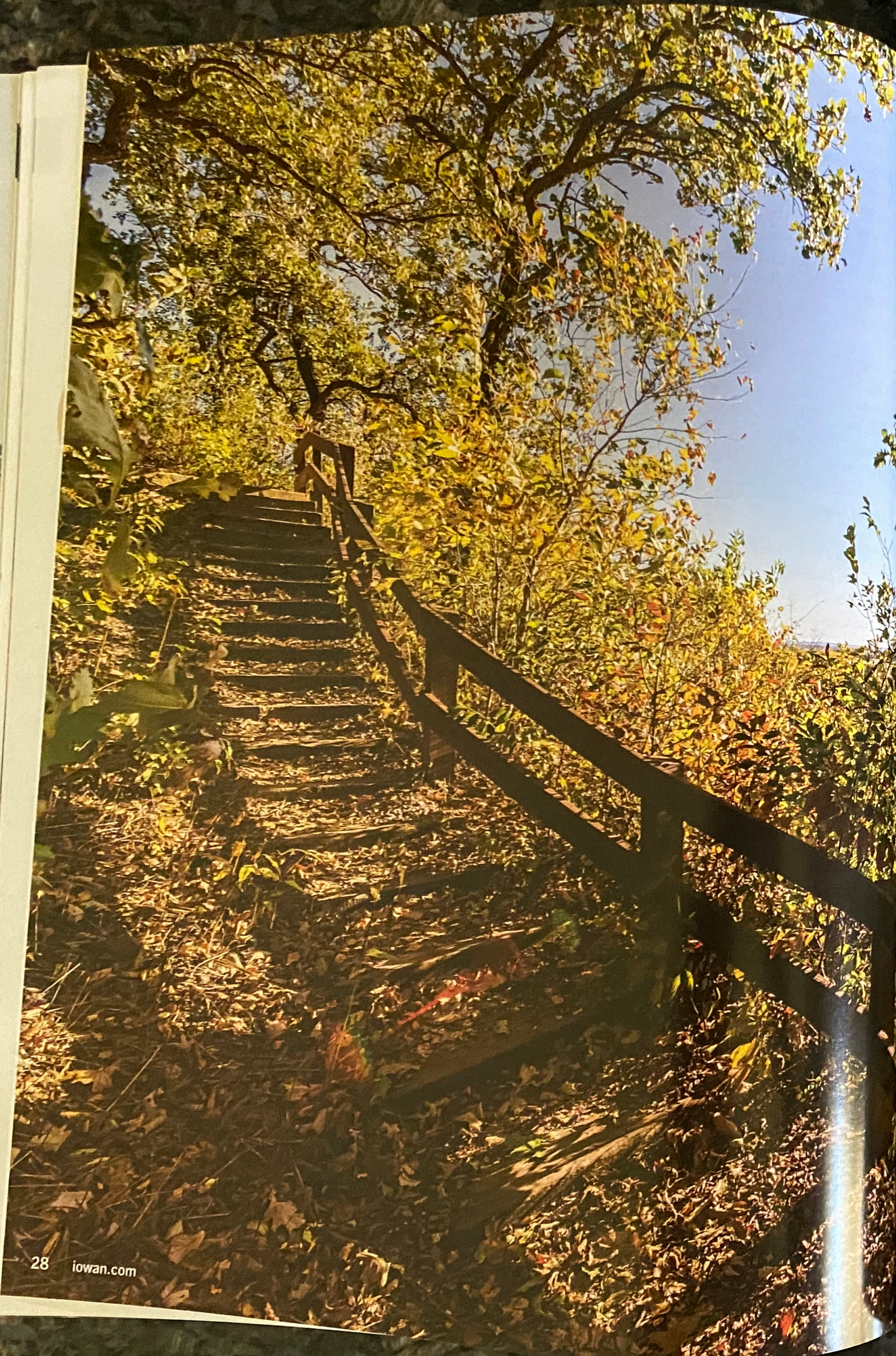
Finish up the trip with a stop at the Lewis and Clark Monument Park just north of Council Bluffs. The explorers met with Otoe and Missouri Native leaders more than 200 years ago at this "council-bluff" before continuing on the journey northwest. Today it's a top spot to see Omaha and Eppley Airfield across the river.

In Council Bluffs, stroll across the river on the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge at Tom Hanafan River's Edge Park for a final view of Big Muddy. The 3,000-foot walkway illuminates at night, making it a perfect evening stroll before checking in to one of the area hotels and dining establishments (walk around West Broadway or South Main Street for local options).



Stone Slat Park



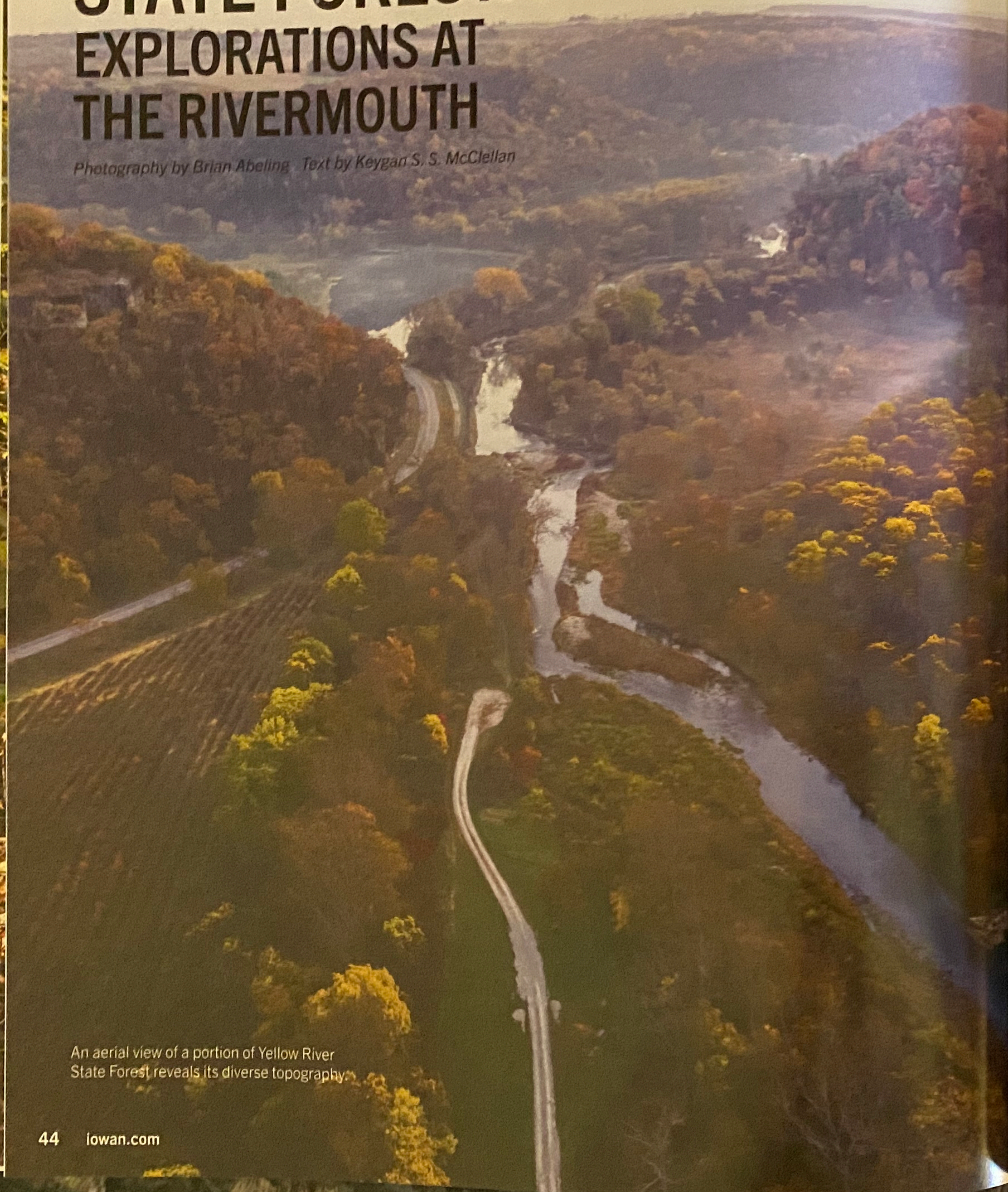


Stone State Park, Sioux City



# YELLOW RIVER STATE FOREST: EXPLORATIONS AT THE RIVERMOUTH

Photography by Brian Abeling Text by Keygan S. S. McClellan



An aerial view of a portion of Yellow River State Forest reveals its diverse topography.



In the Yellow River State Forest in northeast Iowa, green fans cling to the mouth of the Yellow River as it churns into the mighty Mississippi. Imagine yourself in a shrouded vale, sunshine playing through ambering leaves. You could climb a path and survey the tree-cloaked hills and stream-carved valleys. The tranquility yawns over 8,900 total acres, sheltering little mysteries ripe for exploration.

Visitors can explore miles of hiking trails by the power of their own feet, on horseback, or by mountain bike. They can paddle the glittering Yellow River by kayak or fish sparkling trout from the waters. Some will track the secret footfalls of deer in the hunting season, and some will scan the canopy for resident birds like the rare cerulean warbler, or bear witness to the migrating throngs of the Mississippi Flyway.

This forest was walked by humans for thousands of years. The first lands of the State Forest were acquired and developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1935. Part of that original purchase, studded with earthen mounds gathered into animate shapes by ancient hands, became the Effigy Mounds National Monument in 1949.

At one of the many campsites or the rentable camping cabin, visitors can sleep within the murmur of oak, hickory, maple, and basswood trees, branches weaving a cozy basket under starlight. Striving to demonstrate sustainable forestry, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources continues to harvest trees from the Forest, utilizing a small sawmill which has been in operation since 1947. The furniture you use at various State Parks may have come from these very trees.





**Opposite:** Firetower Road pulls visitors through a canopy of deciduous and coniferous trees.

**Above:** When standing at Larkin Overlook, you can see that, among the woods and hills, there is still room for some crops to grow.



**Left:** Near the footbridge over Little Paint Creek, a truck dips its tires in the water flowing over the road.





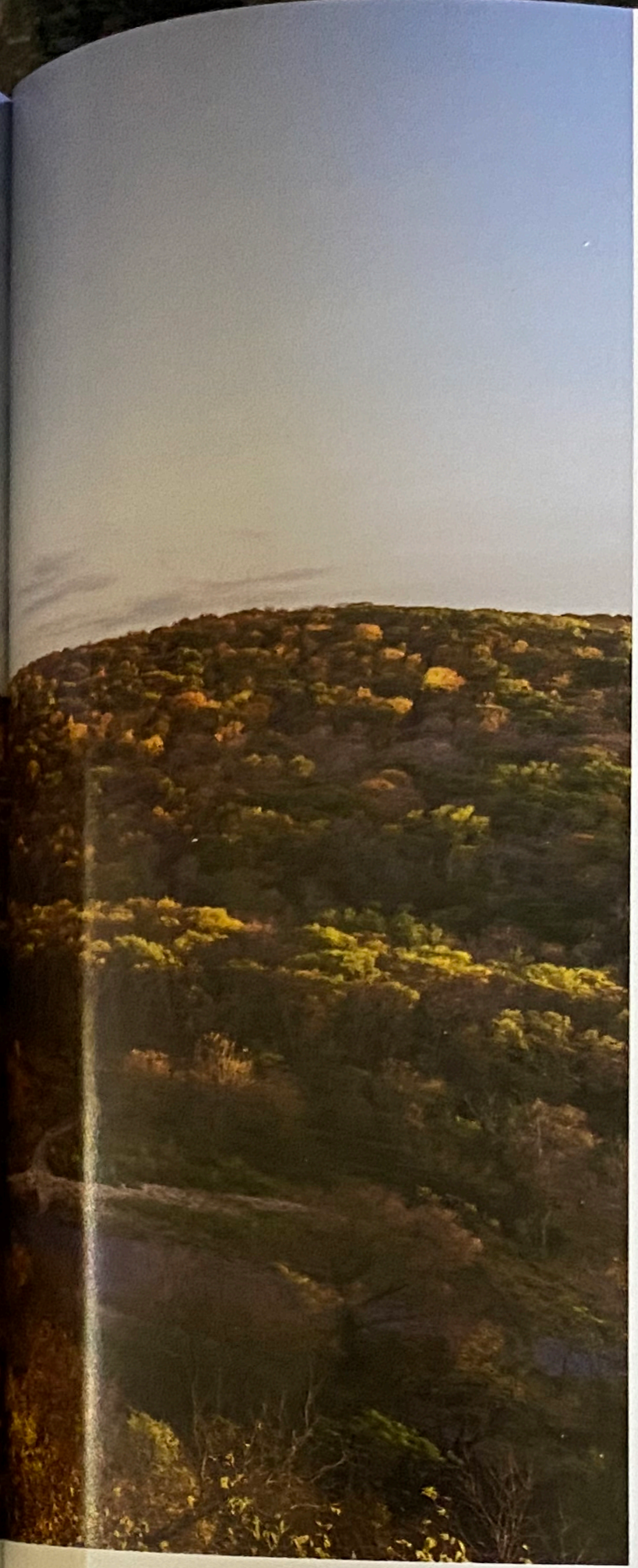
**Above:** At Larkin Overlook and other high points, visitors can soak in fall colors in every direction.

**Opposite, top right:** Recreation opportunities abound inside the park. Hikers and bicyclists share the space with equestrian enthusiasts.

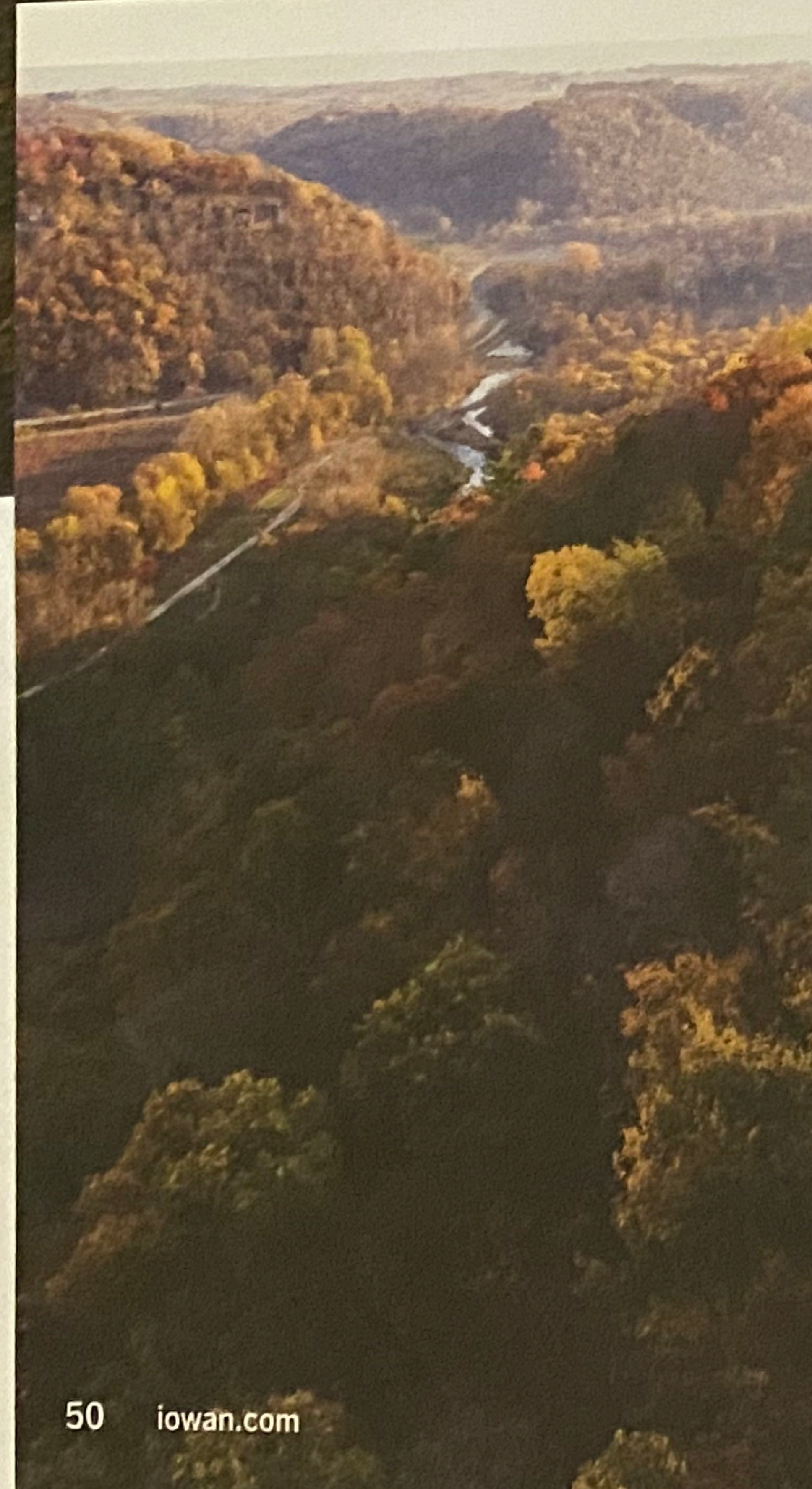
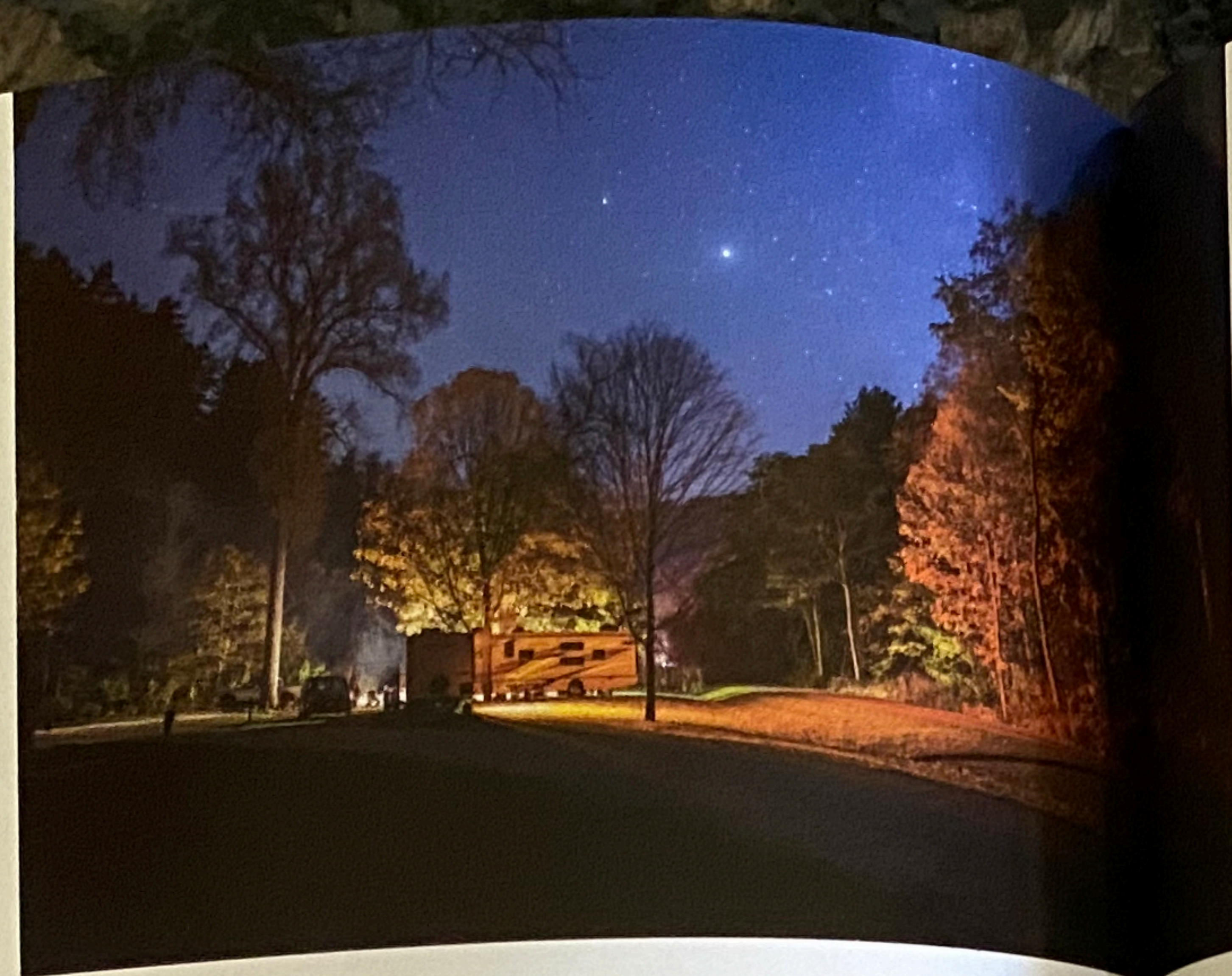
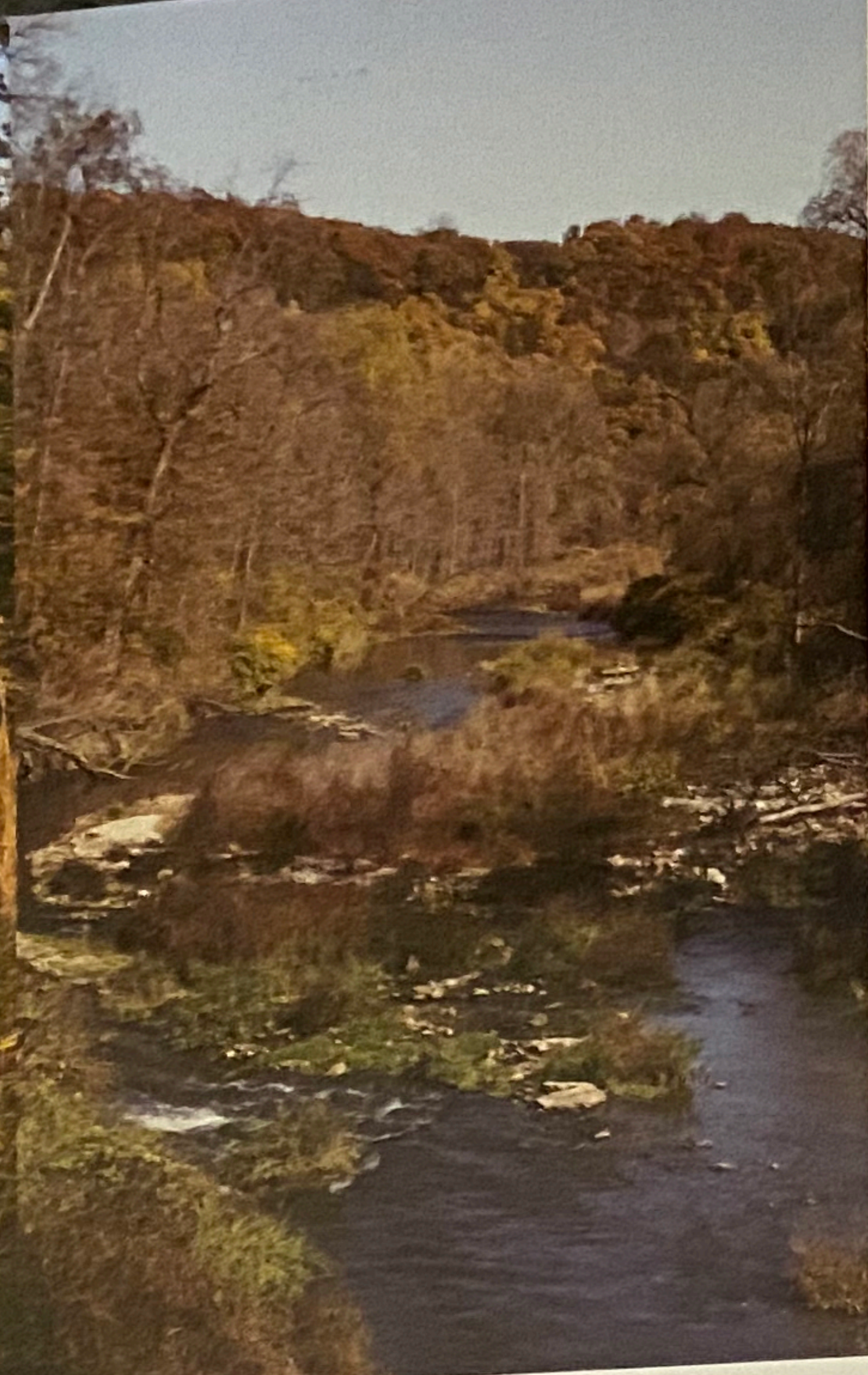
**Opposite, bottom right:** The state forest has several campgrounds with more than 100 sites that can be reserved at [iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com](http://iowastateparks.reserveamerica.com).

**Opposite, bottom left:** As a managed state forest, Yellow River is home to a diverse and curated mix of trees that provide a spectacular show of fall colors.

**Right:** On Firetower Trailer road, fallen trees are a reminder that nature takes its own course inside the park, allowing for rebirth and regeneration.







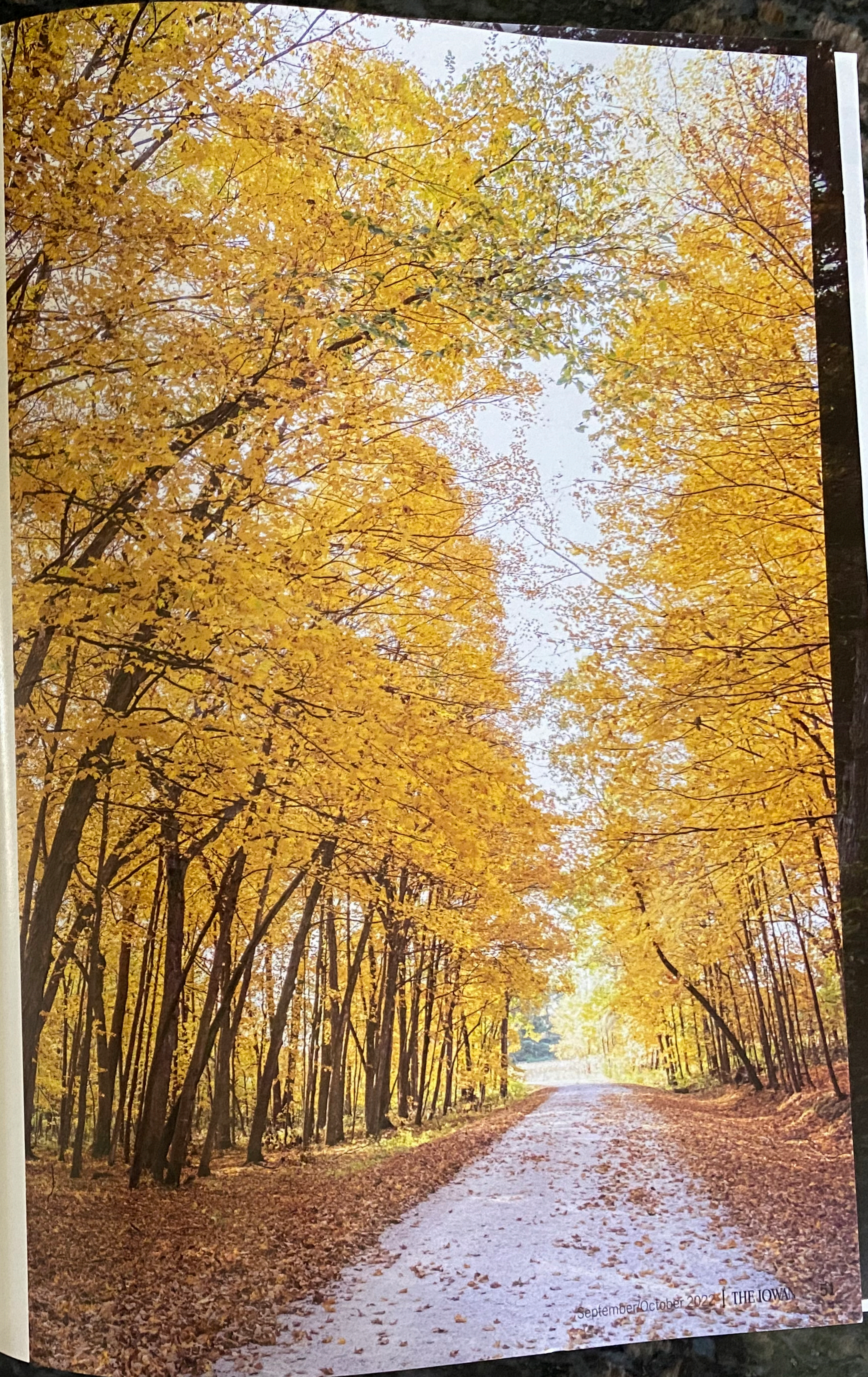
**Top left:** Streams at Yellow River State Forest attract anglers seeking rainbow, brook, and brown trout.

**Top right:** Visitors enjoy an evening at the campground, where campfires and abundant stars in the sky provide a break from routine daily life.

**Above:** Clusters of colorful tents, seen here from Paint Creek Overlook, dot the park's six units that are spread around 8,900 acres in southeastern Allamakee County.

**Left:** The park is part of a landscape feature called Paleozoic Plateau. According to the Iowa DNR, the bedrock here is made up of limestone, sandstone, and dolomite sedimentary rock. Some of this geological history is revealed in exposed rock outcrops.

**Opposite:** A park road that winds through a yellow canopy of leaves makes the park's name seem appropriate.







At Paint Creek Overlook, a glimpse of the sun on the horizon adds to an already spectacular fall view inside the park.