

## Iowa—Portrait of the Land

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Vermaas, Lori. "Iowa—Portrait of the Land." *The Annals of Iowa* 61 (2002), 429-430.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10627>

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cultural significance belonging to the "common inheritance of all mankind"). Cultural landscapes often have layered meanings (and sometimes contested ones), especially those such as Cahokia that date to prehistoric times and have been home to ethnically, culturally, and chronologically distinct peoples, each of whom viewed the site through different and often competing sets of values. Euro-American and Native American visitors continue to draw meaning from the site six centuries after its abandonment by the original inhabitants, although their views as to its spiritual significance are not always the same.

Those who want an entrée to the cultural history of the site and the problems of research and interpretation that frame it will do well to begin here, although the discussion of the Big Bang and the creation of the cosmos, an original feature of this book, could be dispensed with at no cost to the volume's overall worth. *Cahokia: Mirror of the Cosmos* is an excellent companion to Biloine Whiting Young and Melvin L. Fowler's *Cahokia: The Great Native American Metropolis* (University of Illinois Press, 2000). Both works have the virtue of distilling dense monographic research and technical site reports into a smoothly flowing and heartfelt narrative for the nonspecialist.

*Iowa—Portrait of the Land*. Des Moines: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2000. viii, 89 pp. Illustrations, maps, bibliography. \$5.00 paper.

Reviewer Lori Vermaas is a historical researcher and free-lance writer. Her forthcoming book, *Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture*, will be published by the Smithsonian Institution Press in 2003.

During the nineteenth century, Iowans dramatically transformed the state's strikingly diverse prairie land into a farm monoculture, a mercurial metamorphosis reflecting Americans' troublesome relationship with nature. Actually, the changes took only about 75 years. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) briefly surveys that history in *Iowa—Portrait of the Land*, starting with Native Americans' balanced affinity with nature, Euro-Americans' dominating control after 1800, and the conservation movement's emergence in Iowa during the early twentieth century. But the DNR also amply describes and illustrates the natural bounty that remains or that has been recovered, a proactive attempt to stimulate more imaginative perceptions of Iowa's landscape informed by the state's geological, industrial, and natural history.

That is a huge, although highly admirable, goal. At 89 pages, this portrait can only be a basic introduction to Iowa's environmental history. The main purpose of the book, which was released as part of the state's celebration of Earth Day, 2000, is to encourage more responsible

land stewardship, especially as the demographics of land ownership change over to city dwellers. The book's initial historical focus, along with colorful photography and insightful essays and passages offered by a variety of notable environmental advocates—some, like Aldo Leopold, native Iowans—engagingly urge a different way of perceiving landscape. "Step knowingly!" (53) writer Michael Carey lovingly recalls his uncle, a career farmer, recommending to his nephew. A light but thorough overview of the history of Iowa's land for general readers, this book likewise gently introduces the idea that the land's appearance documents layers and layers of the history of human use—a palimpsest of land-use values—whose awareness crucially requires more careful cultivation.

*The Nature of Nebraska: Ecology and Biodiversity*, by Paul A. Johnsgard. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. xxviii, 402 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, glossary, references, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer John Pearson is an ecologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. He is coauthor with Ruth Herzberg of *The Guide to Iowa's State Preserves*.

*The Nature of Nebraska* takes an "ecoregion" approach to the natural history of the state of Nebraska. Part one is a statewide overview of Nebraska's eight ecological regions ("ecoregions"). Part two delves into more detail with individual chapters for each ecoregion. In each chapter, there are sections devoted to major terrestrial communities (such as "dune prairie" and "sandsage prairie" in the Nebraska Sandhills), profiles of typical species, and vignettes of endangered species. Part three provides checklists for flora and fauna, a guide to natural areas, and indexes to articles in *Nebraska State Museum Notes* and *Nebraskaland*. A glossary, bibliography, and index complete the book. The author's exquisite drawings illustrate numerous plants and animals.

This book will help to dispel the stereotype of Nebraska as a flatland of endless cornfields. Armed with *The Nature of Nebraska*, any traveler willing to venture off of monotonous Interstate 80 will be informatively guided to the intriguing landscapes of the Pine Ridge Escarpment, the High Plains, the Loess Hills, the Nebraska Sandhills, the Niobrara Valley, the Eastern Glaciated Plains, and the Missouri Valley. Even the agriculturally dominated Platte Valley (the narrow cornbelt traversed by I-80) is shown to be ecologically interesting. Naturalists in states surrounding Nebraska can learn more of the ecology of their own places by reading about the ecoregions that straddle the political boundary. Iowans, for example, will better appreciate their tallgrass prairies by reading about Nebraska's Eastern Glaciated Plains, which

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