



Wind FLOWERS

A scenic look at windmills
planted across Nebraska

STOIC AS THE soldiers once stationed there, this windmill at Fort Robinson State Park stands over history. The former military fort with roots to 1874 is where Oglala Lakota warrior Crazy Horse met his demise at the end of a soldier's bayonet. Thousands of horses, mules and dogs were later trained here for use in World War II. Windmills reached Nebraska at about the same time as this prairie fortress. These water-pumping steel flowers of the wind have been watering the plains ever since.

photo by ROY SWOBODA

MULTIPLE LAYERS OF light fuse prairie, sky and planets on a windless evening while silhouetting this water pumper near Gretna. Blessed with electric sundowns more often than most, and with plenty of windmills, similar scenes present themselves almost daily somewhere on Nebraska's spacious grasslands.

photo by BRAD GOETSCH





STANDING OVER a well drilled through western Nebraska's rocky crust, this Sioux County windmill is dwarfed by the rocky peaks of Toadstool Geologic Park, 17 miles north of Crawford.

NORTHERN LIGHTS GLOW and bathe this windmill north of Bee with rare waves of purple, green and orange.

photos by LAURIE SCHRAMM (top)
and ERIK JOHNSON (right)



STEEL-BLADED WINDMILLS SUPPLIED

critical water to pioneers and allowed them to settle our state and nation. A tripod and timer helped Lincoln photographer Erik Johnson capture this Pioneers Park self-portrait at dusk.

photo by ERIK JOHNSON



THIS 1908 DEMPSTER is one of three windmills at Windmill State Recreation Area.

photo by DON BROCKMEIER

Milling AROUND WINDMILL

BY ALAN J. BARTELS

DO THE THOUSANDS of cars and big rigs breezing down Interstate 80 each day generate enough of a gust to help turn windmills along the way? Probably not. Nebraska's wind is a reliable source of momentum for the three antique windmills at Windmill State Recreation Area near Gibbon, which need no help turning.

Leaving I-80 at Exit 285 and turning north takes visitors to this 154-acre campground where six lakes entertain anglers and provide habitat for waterfowl in the pinch of the Central Flyway migration hourglass. Sandhill cranes forage in the fields between here and Gibbon, a quick three miles away.

With 69 paved camping sites for campers and recreational vehicles, the park – simply called “Windmill” by regulars – serves as a convenient base camp for discovering local adventures.

Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary and its March and April congregations of sandhill cranes await a quick jaunt to the southwest. Cabela's, the Museum of Nebraska Art and the Classic Car Collection are a few miles away in Kearney. Visitors can leave their camp and be at the famous Harold Warp's Pioneer Village in Minden in 20 minutes.

Before pioneers named the area Windmill Crossing, Pawnee Indians crossed the Platte River nearby during buffalo hunts.

The antique windmills are all in working order. The towers have

been rebuilt. The windmill heads range in age from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. Some are visible from the road. Others require some exploration through the park to find.

“Windflowers” is what Nebraskan poet Ted Kooser calls the water-pumping devices harnessing the breeze across the Plains. The windmills amongst the campgrounds, lakes and trees seem perfectly planted here in the natural landscaping of the Platte River Valley.

“Windmill is a beautiful place for a walk, but I sometimes forget it is there,” said Brian Moody of Kearney. “I need to get out there more often. The park is one of those gems available to anyone.”

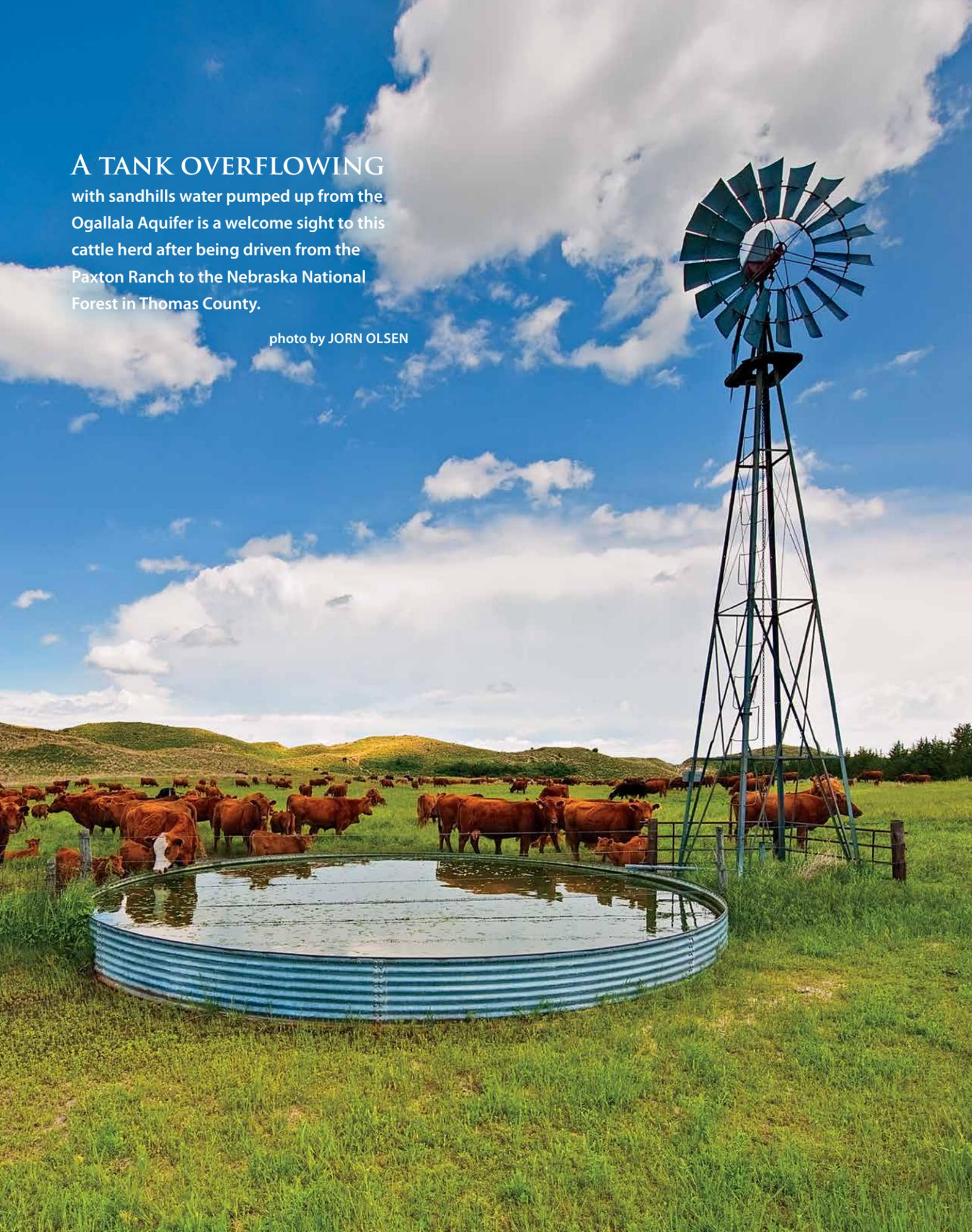
A Nebraska State Park permit is required for vehicles entering the park. They are available at the park entrance. Anglers over age 16 also will need a fishing license to go after the big one. Both permits can be purchased at the convenience store across the road.

Bluegill, largemouth bass, channel catfish and rainbow trout are among the species swimming here. The playground and lush, grassy areas entertain families. The camping areas are complete with plenty of trees that provide shade and dampen the drone of nearby traffic. But many people turn into the park's winding road simply to gaze up at technology from a different age – technology we're using to harness that persistent Nebraska breeze still today.

A TANK OVERFLOWING

with sandhills water pumped up from the Ogallala Aquifer is a welcome sight to this cattle herd after being driven from the Paxton Ranch to the Nebraska National Forest in Thomas County.

photo by JORN OLSEN



ANTIQUE windmills reach for the breeze on a hilltop along Highway 71 north of Scottsbluff.

A TOTAL ECLIPSE of the sun is a daily occurrence at this windmill halfway between Imperial and Grant.

photos by RICHARD TELLER (top) and PAT SCHOENFELDER (left)

Breeze THROUGH WINDMILL PHOTOGRAPHY

TIPS ON OUR TOP PICKS

BY TANNON ASCHE

IF YOU'VE ENJOYED a Nebraska vacation or taken a Sunday drive, windmills seem to help navigate your way. On long road trips, families pass the time peering out the windows trying to be the first to spot the next one of these iconic pieces of Nebraska's rural landscape. Beyond the quick drive-by spotting, photographers are stopping at these stoic sculptures and preserving their stories through beautiful and powerful imagery. What makes these photographs keep our attention? We've made a list of tips that make our top picks stand out.

VANTAGE POINTS Choose an angle and a height that creates a statement and begs for an emotional response to your image. Be adventurous and try out several angles. Your favorite may surprise you.

LIGHTING Although you can take a passable photo of a windmill at any time of day, many of the most compelling photo ops occur at sunrise or sunset. Choose your shots ahead of time to capture the windmill in the soft light of early morning or early evening.

COMPOSITION Use the rule of thirds. With the windmill as your focal point, find where your eye leads you around the frame. Make sure the finished product makes you weave through the foreground, middleground and background of the image.

TECHNIQUE Know your camera equipment. Small adjustments in your aperture and shutter speed can improve how much your subject stands out from the background. Using your camera's full capabilities also opens doors to long exposure and stop-motion photography.

TIMING Sometimes you only have a moment's notice for great shots, and others need a little extra time before you release the shutter. Getting the sun in the right spot or waiting for the colorful clouds to roll in can be the added detail that makes you truly capture the moment.

Want more stunning examples? Visit NebraskaLife.com to see what photos blew their way into our windmill web extra. ▼



ROLLING HILLS, FARM
fields and dramatic skies combine to create a scenic exposure for photographer Ken Smith. The building storm set the windmill to spinning, and beautiful yet ominous hues washed the sky over Cass County as the photographer clicked his shutter in time with the rotating device.

photo by KEN SMITH