

Nebraska: The bland life

Latest tourist trap plan will waste money, natural resources



Think Nebraska. You see what?

Corn.
Football.
Telemarketing.
And other boring stuff.

But you do not see tourism. We have no mountains. No big cities. No real significant culture. No professional sports teams. Hell, we get the cool movies three weeks later than most cities do.

This is not Maui. And you'd think we'd know that.

But Omaha's historian, Jean Dunbar, and Omaha Mayor Hal Daub have forgotten this. Hence, the proposal of Dunbar's vision of "Lake Nebraska."

Clearly, Dunbar didn't think too hard for the name. He should have never thought of the idea in the first place.

"Oh, I've been thinking about it for years — that we desperately need a big lake," the 74-year-old said in an Omaha World-Herald article Saturday.

Uh-huh.

Exactly where did this desperation come from? The lake is intended to be near the Mahoney State Park area, where, apparently, developers would dam up the Platte River and form a lake behind.

It would soften the flood plain. It would damage wildlife in the area. At one time, in the 1960s, a dam was to be built around the same area. Had that been done, some small towns that are here now would have sunk.

Such a lake would be a complete waste of money. Yet Hal Daub is considering it. Of course, there's not a whole lot of people taking this as seriously as he is.

Still, what is this notion of making the state something it's not? Geologically, it's farmland. Our state doesn't have huge above-ground lakes; it has aquifers. Why? Because you're supposed to grow stuff here, stupid.

This state has a continual problem with its tourism inferiority. Of the states that surround us, most of them have strong tourism industries, especially Colorado. Only Kansas and Iowa share Nebraska's lack of sex appeal. And of those three, the Cornhusker state is the ugliest of all.

Which is fine, as all states aren't topographically created equal. But that doesn't stop our state from building yucky tourist traps that suck money from anyone foolish enough to try them out. And most of the tourists are Nebraskans.

Kearney seems to be a hot spot, with that million-dollar arch that creates accidents and its venerable Fort Kearny, which features glass-bottom boat rides for \$1.75.

In Neligh, one can pay \$1 to see flour made (never mind the gallons of gas money needed to actually get to Neligh).

This is called, creatively enough, Neligh Mills.

I'd rather buy an Orange Slice.

Harold Warp's Pioneer Village in Minden presents itself as "Nebraska's No. 1 Attraction." Yes, for \$7 you have the opportunity to see old time barber shops and old cars — among the other things that one might find in a museum that doesn't take four separate highways to access.

To the trap's credit, it has a motel because it is so out of the way that no one will have the energy to spend four hours finding another one.

Nature-wise, Lake McConaughy is the largest lake in the state and a haven for booze and wild parties, hardly a good tourist spot. Most of the lakes in this state offer little more than decent fishing and the occasional small boat ride.

There's river rafting on the Niobrara River near Valentine, a few beautiful spots in the Sandhills, other reasonably picturesque spots. But, more or less, this state is devoid of tourist

goodness outside of a few fine museums in Omaha and Lincoln.

Which is maybe why Dunbar thinks we actually need a Lake Nebraska. I still say no.

Tourism, really profitable tourism anyway, is for out-of-state folks. Why gouge your in-state people? That's like taking money we already have and giving it back to the state pot. And with only one interstate (we're one of the few in the continental United States that doesn't have at least two), access to most of the state is impossible. Things might be different if the drive through Nebraska was a thrill ride of nature and beauty.

It is not.

So what, really, are the chances of someone from Chicago, outside of Clark W. Griswold, getting up to Neligh Mills? Pretty low. Seems pointless to build a giant lake that will destroy towns and nature for the sake of dollars that our state will just be giving back to itself. The upshot is that most of the people who attended Dunbar's vision session on Friday left unimpressed. It just wasn't going to work.

Especially if you give it the name Lake Nebraska.



SHAWN BALLARIN/DN

Samuel McKewon is a junior news-editorial and political science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist and sports editor.

Evaluaciones en la mitad del semestre

La idea de ASUN mejoraría la calidad de la enseñanza

La posibilidad de que los estudiantes evalúen a sus instructores en la mitad del semestre, debería ser entendida como un buen comienzo para mejorar la calidad académica de cualquier universidad.

Mientras un estudiante toma un promedio de quince exámenes por periodo académico, un profesor es examinado solamente una vez al finalizar el semestre. Hay una desproporción injusta, pues el proceso educativo incluye tanto al que aprende como al que enseña, y en este sentido ambos deben ser evaluados permanentemente para optimizar los logros.

Indudablemente, el profesor es parte vital en el aula de clase. Por ello

desconfío mucho de las nuevas tendencias educativas que asignan al docente un mero rol de mediador o de simple guía. Hasta se ha llegado a pensar en que un profesor podría fácilmente ser remplazado por un computador o por un libro. Falso! El estudiante necesita la presencia de alguien que le hable, explique, oriente y lo lleve a la fuente del conocimiento; ese alguien es el profesor.

Sin embargo, en la actualidad son muy pocos los que asumen con responsabilidad su labor de maestros; algunos de ellos han llegado a donde están por simple casualidad: no tenían más que hacer. Son personas con formación en otras disciplinas,

pero no en la de enseñar. Piensan ellos que el tener alguna experiencia en ciertas áreas del conocimiento los faculta para enfrentar una clase con 25 ó 30 estudiantes. Creen ellos que el proceso de enseñanza se reduce a la tiza, el borrador, la pizarra y un libro. Se lamentan ellos de la mediocridad de sus estudiantes. Suponen ellos que tienen la autoridad moral para examinar constantemente a sus alumnos, pero se niegan ellos a que sus pupilos los evalúen, critiquen o les hagan sugerencias.

Obviamente no se puede generalizar. Existen profesores entregados de lleno a su función de maestros. Se actualizan en sus conocimientos, leen sobre pedagogía, asisten a seminarios

o conferencias sobre educación, comprenden el modo de ser y de pensar de sus estudiantes, están concientes de que el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje es más complejo de lo pensado. Estos profesores con vocación de Maestros son exitosos en sus aulas de clase, motivan la participación activa, aceptan críticas y siempre están dispuestos a aprender algo nuevo de sus propios alumnos. Este tipo de instructores todavía existen, por ellos muchos estudiantes permanecen en la universidad.

Es verdad, nuestro sistema educativo tiene múltiples fallas, y una de ellas radica en los docentes y sus métodos de enseñanza. También es cierto que no se puede pedir exclusi-

vamente instructores con Ph.D., en educación, dispuestos a gastar sus años de vida en una aula de clase; pero al menos, el estudiante debería tener el derecho a expresar lo que piensa sobre la forma como su profesor imparte conocimientos y actúa en la clase.

Estoy totalmente de acuerdo con ASUN en evaluar a los profesores en la mitad y al final del semestre; sin embargo, propongo que estas evaluaciones se hagan cada mes y que los docentes pongan en práctica las recomendaciones dadas por sus pupilos. Con absoluta seguridad, tanto estudiantes como profesores saldrán ganando, y quizá la calidad de la educación tienda a mejorar.

Heartland drive a desolate experience

There's a low thump-thump-thump as my Oldsmobile passes over the seams in the concrete of the highway, and the stereo belts out David Lowery singing, "Eurotrash girl!"

Birds turn long before they see the faded metallic-blue behemoth rushing across the gray expanse of nothingness.

No one else hears, though, because the car's passing through the middle of the void, somewhere out in the expanse of the Heartland where blood doesn't seem to pump.

Something about the music of Cracker captures this drive exactly: there are bursts of activity and excitement, but much of the intermittent time is filled with expanses of soothing calmness.

Deep Nebraska is a slowly played steel guitar and a gravel-voiced songsmith.

Despite the whine of bending guitar strings escaping my speakers at high levels, I can't shake that thump-thump-thump behind the music.

I shoot a few glances off either side of Route 50, looking for something that might indicate life off in the distance, but for the most part, I am left wanting.

For every tractor I see that merely waits for its owner to return, I see five barns that look as though they haven't seen human hands in decades.

Like skeletons of wood still standing on rolling hills, the boards have swollen and burst, hay falling through cracks and gaps.

I slow down the Olds at one point to get a better look at a house that rests only a few dozen yards from the side of the road. The insides have been gutted, and instead of bustling with life, it's nothing but empty frames — door frames, window frames, a frame in a frame in a frame.

Someone once lived here, I think to myself.

With a lean of my foot, the Olds swallows down the gas and thrusts forward energetically, almost as though it feared that it, too, might suffer the same fate.

With an exhaled breath bordering on a sigh, the sun begins its long walk over the horizon and starts to give those life-giving rays to other parts of the world.

I flick my fingers against the switch, and the eyes of the car snap open, twin beams of light casting paths in the darkness rapidly overtaking us.

For a moment, as the compact disc player is between tracks, there's silence — everything is gone, from the purr of the engine to that thump-thump-thump I thought would never disappear — and I understand what it's like to be the only person for miles around.

Somewhere around Syracuse, though, Cracker kicks back in, the feral roar of the engine winds back up, and everything's in motion again.

I carry a piece of solitary Nebraska with me to this day, deep beneath my heartland, and that voyage — the trip of endless, lifeless cornfields — never seems to end.

Behind my eyes, on those nights when there's nothing else to think of, I imagine a spiraling black hole of maize and wonder what lies on the other side.

I can only hope it's not just another Conoco fill-up joint.

— Cliff Hicks

Horacio Pérez-Henao is a graduate student in modern languages and literature and a guest columnist for the Daily Nebraskan.