

## A Honey of a Summer

*Slowly...slowly.....the burnished copper tint of first light stretches across the horizon, mirrored in the deep, silent waters of Rathbun Lake.*

*Breezes whisper at the mist suspended over the glassy surface, sending it scuttling into the lush prairie grasses beyond the zigzagging shoreline.*

*A drowsy whip-poor-will rousts itself for one last sleepy song, and before its closing trill meanders through the timber, dawn shimmers and shakes and finally explodes...all fiery orange and pink...over Honey Creek Resort State Park.*



### THE SERENE INAUGURAL

of a summer day at Honey Creek belies the hours to follow, for while tranquility may lurk somewhere, the resort is not a “lazy days of summer” sort of place. At Iowa’s first destination park and its anchor, Rathbun Lake, there’s such a flurry of outdoor activity keeping guests hopping—happily so—that the word lazy doesn’t fit. But refreshing, renewing, fun? Those work!

Although visitors are welcome for any length of stay,

Jeremy Slagel, resort general manager, explains, “As a destination park, Honey Creek’s accommodations and outdoor opportunities are designed to attract guests for a week or longer.”

The accommodations Slagel refers to are of the “something-for-everyone” variety: the lodge, with 105 spacious rooms, conference center and oh-so-welcoming lobby (though any kid knows the coolest feature of the building is Buccaneer Bay, the indoor water park); the cabins, all 28 luxurious with one to four



Set in the laid-back beauty of southern Iowa, Honey Creek Resort State Park, with Rathbun Lake as its anchor, offers the best of all worlds to vacationers, families, conventioners, campers and sports enthusiasts alike. A vast range of activities, dining experiences and accommodations, including the imposing lodge, await the lucky traveler to this welcoming oasis, the state's newest outdoor destination park.

bedrooms and electric fireplaces; and the RV park, offering 20 full-service hookups and a nearby boat ramp, picnic shelters, and playground equipment. Not to be forgotten are the cabins and multiple campsites in the original Honey Creek State Park, several miles from the new resort.

To be sure, great lodging goes a long way, but add myriad outdoor opportunities and—bingo!—it's the winning combination that makes the resort the popular summer oasis it has become.

#### **IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE WATER**

Rathbun Lake offers 11,000 sparkly acres of fun in the sun. Much of the water activity begins at the resort dock, a short jaunt from the lodge, where 50 slips hold both private and rental watercraft. There, boats and jet skis bob expectantly, waiting for takers, while kayaks and canoes rest on the shore, begging to be pushed into action.

Fishing ranks as Rathbun's number one sport—always has, always will—and while most anglers want to be



# Lost In Iowa



**ABOVE:** On a sunny afternoon, Mary Pat Sinclair takes resort visitors on a pontoon ride around Lake Rathbun, the perfect way to observe nature both on the lake and along the shoreline. **TOP RIGHT:** A boat ramp, docking facilities and watercraft rentals (jet skis, canoes and motor boats) are within easy walking distance of both the lodge and cabins. **BELOW RIGHT:** At Honey Creek, you'll never hear "There's nothing to do." Rathbun Lake offers 11,000 acres of fun on the water, exploring the nearby woodlots, hiking, fishing and daily organized activities.

out on the lake, the dock, endowed with fenced sides, roof, comfy chairs, and accommodating hole in the floor, introduces a laid-back version of the pastime. It also provides a safe location for DNR fishing lessons for kids. Frequently, a squeal of victory floats from the dock up to the lodge patio, a signal that a youngster has just caught that first-ever fish.

Or, maybe that squeal comes from the newly opened swimming beach farther down the shore where Mallory Downs, resort activities director, and a group of youngsters are gathered. "We have water games going on daily, like Dribble, Dribble, Drench and Beat the Drip," says Downs. "Lots of kids staying at the resort sign up for our programs."

A guided Twilight Tour of the lake is always a crowd pleaser. Near the end of a sun-filled day, Mary Pat Sinclair, whose family operates the watercraft rental business Quality Power Sports, guides passengers onto a pontoon for an hour-long cruise. "This is the perfect time to be on the water," she sighs. Everyone agrees.

Prairie grasses and lavender and yellow wildflowers

dot most of the shore's 155 miles. Seagulls swoop overhead, no doubt giddy with their lot in life, and a prevailing breeze gives life to two sailboats. A man in a distant fishing rig can be heard shouting gleefully, "I got it!" as he reels in what apparently is a good-sized walleye, crappie or catfish, the lake's most popular catches.

During the ride, Sinclair indicates the location where President Richard Nixon dedicated the lake in 1971. She also points out Island View and Prairie Ridge, two of the other parks and campgrounds on Rathbun's shore. In one of the unnamed coves, a large boat is anchored for the night, its cabin lights glowing in the twilight.

As the pontoon returns to the dock, the expansive lodge looms from the earth, the setting sun framing it in fire, while lights in the lobby blaze an unspoken "Welcome back!"

On a different moonlit night, another water adventure begins with the stealth-like entry of DNR-provided kayaks into the lake. Although daytime programs are available for novice kayakers, night ventures are for



**ABOVE:** Recognized by three national golf magazines in their annual rankings of top United States courses, the 18-hole championship Preserve Golf Course is an exciting and scenic part of Honey Creek Resort State Park. The Audubon-certified course has an on-site PGA professional. **UPPER RIGHT:** Day's end comes gently at the resort. Behind the lodge, frequent gatherings near the campfire brings guests from around the world together for conversation and story telling. Nothing wraps up a day more satisfying nor contributes more to a good night's sleep than a hike along the resorts trails under the light of a full summer moon.

the experienced, according to guide and interpreter Kenneth Hamilton. “Paddling under a full summer moon is breathtaking,” he says. “The living night accompanies us, the slight wind makes the black night breathe, and moonbeams kiss the water, spraying us with light.” Equally enamored is Jennifer Nolan, of Centerville. “Night kayaking is magical,” she says. “You feel so alive. All the senses are heightened.”

### **THERE'S LOTS FOR LANDLUBBERS, TOO**

On either side of the winding entrance into Honey Creek Resort, the pristine bent grass fairways and greens of The Preserve Golf Course beg to be admired—and played. Darin Fisher, director of golf, says the 18-hole championship course has rave reviews. “Reaction has been beyond our expectations.”

Of course an on-site PGA professional and golf carts equipped with GPS don't hurt, but other features make The Preserve anything but an everyday golfing experience. “It's Audubon-certified,” explains Erik

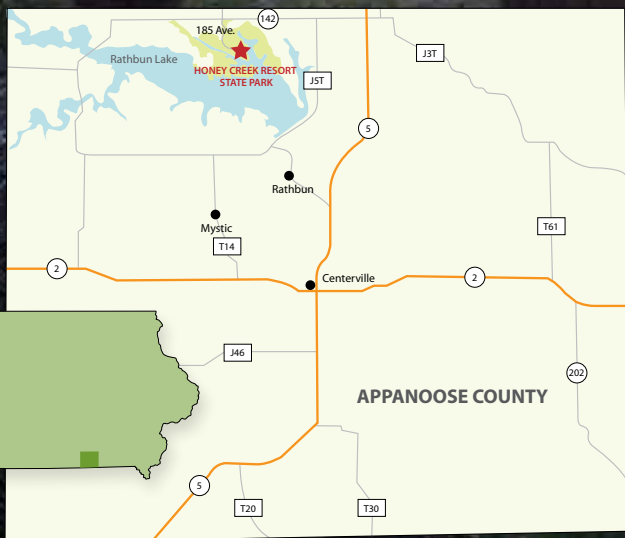
Hansen, golf superintendent, “meaning that the existing prairie and oak and hickory savanna were left relatively undisturbed during course construction. We maintain wildlife habitat and conduct educational outreach here, too.” He emphasizes that strict guidelines regarding chemicals are followed and only reclaimed water is used. Golfers also are treated to stunning views from many of the tees, including No. 5, which looks down upon Ham Creek as it flows into Rathbun Lake.

For visitors wanting to observe nature up close, miles of multi-use trails follow the shoreline and wind through the wooded areas of the park and resort. Des Moines resident Sharon Bandstra is convinced Honey Creek has it all. “The resort even provides a backpack loaded with everything a hiker needs,” she says appreciatively, “and our guide explained everything we were seeing: animals, birds, vegetation. Who knew that Queen Anne's lace was in the carrot family or that Iowa sumac isn't poisonous? I sure didn't.”

Those who like to take off on their own can go right



# Lost In Iowa



On a perfect July evening, reluctant to go indoors after a tales-around-the-campfire presentation by DNR guide and interpreter Kenneth Hamilton, guests linger around the campfire, enjoying the remains of the delicious summer day.



### Live the Lodge Life

Buy gift cards or make reservations at [www.honeycreekresort.com](http://www.honeycreekresort.com) or 1-877-677-3344.



# Lost In Iowa



**ABOVE LEFT:** With the help of eager audience participants, instructor Kenneth Hamilton conducts a class on outdoor Dutch oven cooking, one of many such offerings at Honey Creek presented by DNR staff. **RIGHT:** Beneath the towering trees encircling Rathbun Lake, the 28 upscale cottages at the resort are not only luxurious, but also charming and welcoming.

ahead. Interpretive signs and wildlife viewing blinds and platforms are plentiful on the trails. Display boards along the short but fascinating Woodland Interpretive Trail let hikers know that the earthen knolls they encounter are sacred prehistoric Indian mounds.

To top off a summer day on land, a full-moon night hike is in order. With DNR guide Lizzy Monat leading the way, participants follow a pitch-black path...until the blood-red orb skims the treetops, causing everyone to gasp. A barred owl proclaims its approval of the nocturnal wonder by issuing a hearty “oo-oo-ooo-oooo,” and Bandstra whispers, “ And I thought the afternoon hike was as good as it gets!”

Hikers and bikers can travel on the resort’s paved trails as well. Bikes, tandem bikes and baby trailers can be rented for an hourly or daily fee.

A different mode of transportation is offered on Friday and Saturday afternoons, when Billy and Barney come clip-clopping up the resort drive about five o’clock, pulling a white carriage with red-cushion seats. The two

paint/haflinger horses, with owner Brenda Hebl at the reins, give passengers a merry little ride on the roads around the lodge. “Everyone smiles when they see us,” laughs Hebl. “It gives people joy.”

## **TIME TO KICK BACK A LITTLE**

Don’t even think about trying to find nothing to do at Honey Creek. That’s impossible. However, when you’re ready to pull up a chair and just observe and learn, there are programs galore—like an evening presentation by Hamilton on outdoor Dutch oven cooking. With 30 children and adults licking their lips, Hamilton, with the help of volunteers, prepares deer steak, zucchini cakes and chocolate cherry cake. Tom and Susan Duncan, of Blue Grass, are intrigued. “We’re planning to buy a Dutch oven and need some pointers,” says Susan. Volunteers Maggie Fleming, of St. Louis, Mo., opens two cans of cherry pie filling; Minnesota residents Christa Hanann and her nephew, Aidan Mellesmoen, crush crackers for the zucchini; and Lorena Hardinger, of Albia, peels the



**TOP LEFT:** Brenda Hebl and her two paint/haflinger horses, Billy and Barney, offer carriage rides on the resort grounds each Friday and Saturday afternoon. **LOWER LEFT:** Bikers find no lack of paved trails at the resort. Bikes, tandem bikes and baby trailers are available for rent by the hour or day. **RIGHT:** Enjoy a satisfying meal at Honey Creek Resort, either indoors at the handsomely designed and furnished Lakeshore Grille or on the attractive patio with sweeping views over the water.

zucchini. Within 40 minutes, the hot coals on the lids and under the ovens have worked their magic, and everyone enjoys a taste test.

More evening entertainment? How about a spooky story or a fable around the campfire behind the lodge? A rapt audience listens to Hamilton’s interpretation of how bears lost their tails, asks questions regarding the tragedy, and joins in as he sings camp songs. When it’s all over, Kathleen Crall, of Urbandale, with grandchildren in tow, remarks, “This has been a great way to end the day. Our only regret is that it ended too soon.”

**YOU’VE GOTTA’ HAVE FUEL**

No resort passes muster without a good restaurant, and Rathbun Lakeshore Grille, which includes a restaurant, lounge and outdoor patio, satisfies all the needs—and stomachs—of diners. Many diners! According to Kenny Peterson, restaurant manager, “Some months we’ve had three times the customers we anticipated.” Maybe that’s because Chef Patrick Koffman has a goal. “I like to put

a little ‘wow factor’ in our menu, like putting a twist on classic menu items,” he says. Both Peterson and Koffman are adamant about using Iowa products, including the state’s wines and beers.

Not only resort guests patronize Lakeshore Grille. From throughout Iowa, diners come to enjoy the food and soak up the ambiance. Judi Millemon, Karen Seeley and Dee Beechum, from the nearby communities of Moravia, Centerville and Mystic, respectively, meet monthly on the patio to eat and reconnect. “The native vegetation, the lake view of sailboats and skiers—it’s beautiful,” says Millemon. “Plus, we love the food,” adds Beechum.

At the end of a day packed with activity, it’s only natural that just before nodding off—in the lodge, a cabin, an RV or a tent—guests take stock of the day and contemplate tomorrow.

“Let’s see... breakfast in the Grille, then a bike ride, maybe I’ll rent a boat and take the kids fishing, then...we’ll...”

Finally...Honey Creek Resort State Park rests!  
But only for a few brief hours. 🐾