



BLOG

Farmers' Stock Tanks and Grain Bins Find New Life in Nebraska



By Marie Bartlett 6/18/2015 2:24:00 PM

Nebraskans' are known for a lot of things – the Pony Express route, birthplace of the 911 emergency systems, Warren Buffet (who resides in Omaha), the Cornhuskers, and a typically friendly hospitality and down-to-earth nature. But it seems they've also cornered the market on good ole all-American ingenuity. Where else but in Nebraska will you see river adventures take place in cattle ranch stock tanks?

The unusual sport is called “tankin” – in which round, metal livestock tanks are used to float down the calm waters of the Middle Loup River near Mullen, Nebraska. *American Profile Magazine* named it “one of America’s great rafting trips” in 2013.



Leave it to the resourceful Nebraskans to find a way to utilize farmers' stock tanks. “Tankin” began in 2004 on the placid Middle Loup River. The largest tanks are 9 feet in diameter and hold up to eight adults.



Prepping for the ride. Cattle once drank from these used stock tanks.

Though the idea is beginning to spread in certain farmland areas where stock tanks are more commonly found, it's still unique to Nebraska as a family adventure, says Mitch Glidden and his wife, Patty, owners of the Sandhills Motel and Glidden Canoe Rental, which offers a number of river recreations, including canoeing, kayaking, tubing and tanking.

While the Gliddens say experienced canoeists and kayakers love to navigate the nearby Dismal River with its swift current and winding channels, it's the calmer Middle Loup that provides some of the best scenery and relaxing rides. Mitch added that not every river can be safely navigated by inexperienced canoeists or kayakers, but "tankin" is easy, fun and safe for any age. Tankers range from toddlers to grandparents, all of whom seem to enjoy a lazy float down the Middle Loup in the metal tanks.



Waiting on fellow passengers in a tank designed to hold eight. Benches inside the tank make it easy for families to ride together, making “tankin” a social event.

I was there in late May, when the weather can still bring rain and chilly winds across the Sandhills Region. Temperatures dipped into the 30s at night, high 50s in the noonday sun. We brought sandwiches and a cooler too, turning the half-day ride into a river picnic.



Off like a herd of turtles.

Surprisingly, since Nebraska is part of the Great Plains and often thought of as dry, the state actually has more miles of river than anywhere else in the U.S. In fact, says Muriel Clark, assistant director of the North Platte Lincoln County Convention & Visitors Bureau, water is “everything to Nebraska.” Not only does it allow for diversity in agriculture, wildlife, botany and lay of the land, it provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities throughout the mixed-grass prairie.

The Sandhills Region, with elevations reaching up to more than 3,000 feet (highest level in the Great Plains), overlays and anchors about 20,000 square miles. Thought to be the largest dune field in the western hemisphere, comprising about one-third of the northwestern part of the state, the Sandhills were designated a National Natural Landmark in 1984. It overlays a shallow water table that extends under portions of eight different states, supplying drinking water for about 80 percent of people who live on the Plains.



*The scenic Sandhills Region of Nebraska. Nebraska has more miles of river than other state.
Photo: courtesy [Nebraska Tourism](#)*

Choose between a two-hour and a five-hour tank trip, then sit back and relax. Tanks are stable enough to provide a smooth ride (similar to tubing). The only obstacles we encountered were fallen trees that had embedded into the mud during recent heavy rains but a push and a shove by fellow passengers was all it took to get unstuck.



A fallen tree in the distance is one of the few obstacles to overcome on the Middle Loup River.

Photo: courtesy [Nebraska Tourism](#)

Along the way, you're likely to see white tail and mule deer, muskrats, beaver, pheasant, grouse and wild turkey, as well as occasional local ranch horses.

Besides tankin, the Gliddens offer bird-watching, wilderness river adventures for canoeists and in off-season, the Polar Bear Tank Race, a local fundraiser held the first Saturday in March.

Trips include equipment and shuttle to and from the river. For details call 888-278-6167, or visit [the website](#).

Grain Bins Find a New Home

About 70 miles from Mullen, in North Platte, is Grain Bin Antique Town. Here, owners Pat and Lori Clinch decided to purchase and restore 15 historic wooden and octagon-shaped granaries, another staple once found on Nebraska farms. Pre-fabricated structures provided to Midwestern farmers by the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s, the bins were brought to Nebraska to store grain in order to build up a surplus in the event of a world war.

The Clinches moved the granaries onto their property in the hills south of town, built a rustic boardwalk, and invited vendors to fill them with antiques and collectibles for sale.



Everything from decorative iron to full-on antiques fills these bins. The boardwalk, more than a century old, was salvaged from an elementary school.



A peek at what's inside one of 15 grain bins at the Grain Bin Antique Town in North Platte, Nebraska. Owners Pat and Lori Clinch are hoping to acquire more.

Pat Clinch says he got the idea for Grain Bin Town because he loves to restore old things and appreciates the history behind the bins. Besides, he says, it's just plain fun to have them onsite.

Which may help explain why Nebraska – among its many other attributes – is a place where some of the most contented people in America live, according to a 2013 survey of “Top 10 States with the happiest residents.”



Waste not, want not is the mantra at Grain Bin Antique Town, where this farmer's funnel was recycled to create a one-of-a-kind lamp.

For details on the Grain Bin Antique Town, visit [the website](#) or call 308-539-7401. For more on the state's attractions, visit the [Nebraska Tourism Commission's website](#).

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