

# Driving in a Painted World

“Sandwiched among the months of September to November exists a season exploding with vibrant colors.”

by Brenda Kleinjan

**S**OUTH DAKOTANS AND MINNESOTANS OFTEN joke that their states have three seasons: summer, winter and road construction.

But sandwiched among the months of September to November exists a season exploding with vibrant colors as trees and prairie grasses shed their summer greens and don an explosive mix of yellows, oranges, reds and shades in between.

These colors beckon many to hop in their cars and hit the open road to admire the fleeting tapestry.

“One spot that I think is one of the biggest secrets in the region is Camden State Park south of Marshall, Minn.,” said Dr. John Ball, professor of forestry at South Dakota State University in Brookings, S.D.

“It is drop dead gorgeous. It’s a sugar maple stand, so when the sugar maples are in color, it is spectacular. It also has cottonwoods, oaks and the colors are spectacular,” said Ball.

One can sense the excitement in Ball’s voice as he describes the forested stand. Camden State Park lies along Minnesota Highway 23 southwest of Marshall, Minn.

Another appeal of Camden to Ball is the lack of crowds.

“Because it’s in the southwest part of the state, most people don’t think of it. The forest there

doesn’t know it’s in southwest Minnesota, it thinks it’s in northeastern Minnesota so you see trees that you don’t normally associate with this part of the state,” Ball said.

Ball feels so strongly about the park’s splendor that a visit to the park is part of the curriculum for his forest ecology class.

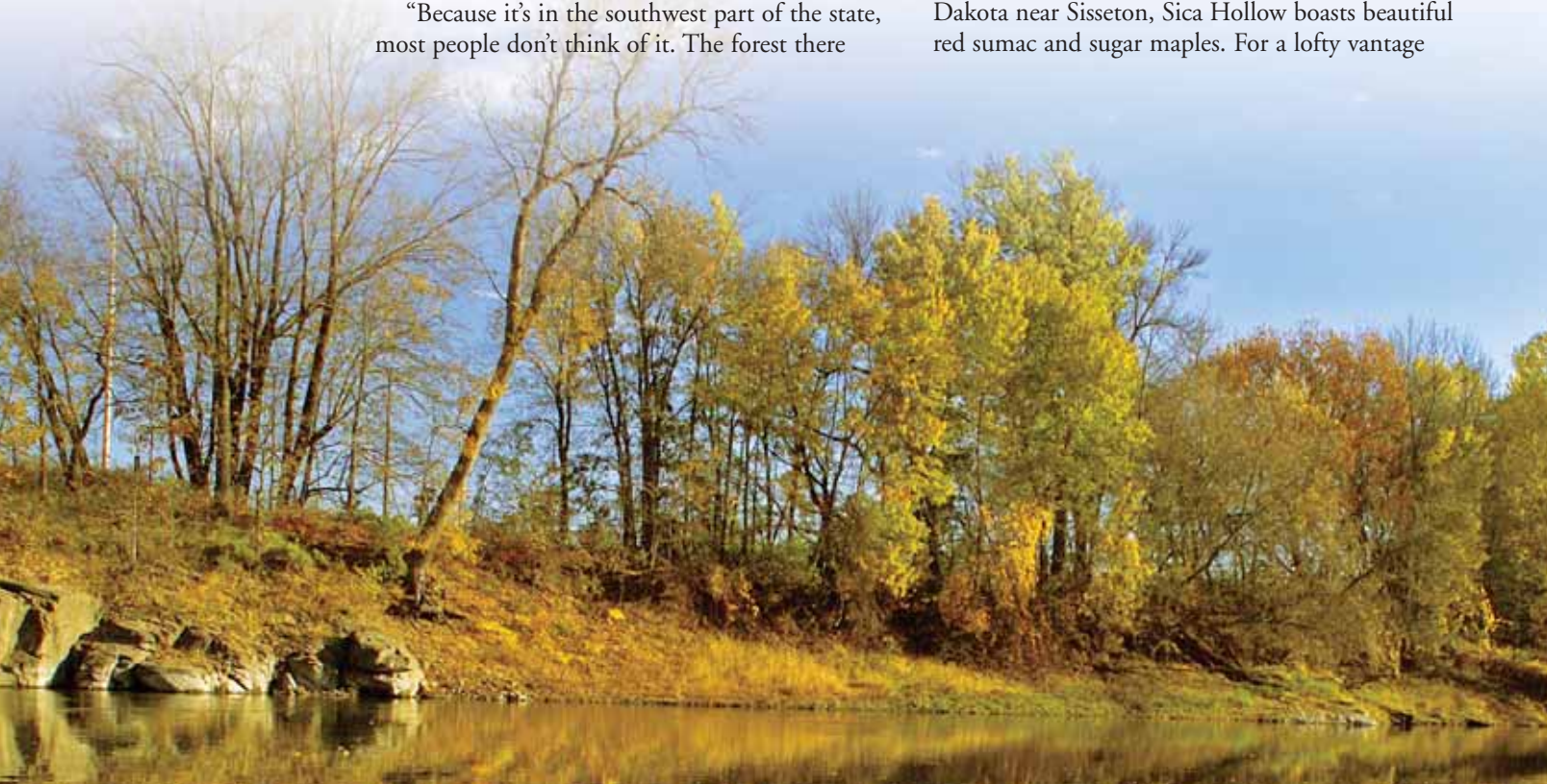
Ball said other parts of South Dakota have appeal for those looking to take a drive and admire nature’s fall paintbrush.

## Other areas of note to view the changing of colors:

**Spearfish Canyon** – The beauty of Spearfish Canyon’s fall metamorphosis is one well known and well photographed in the state. The 20-mile drive from Spearfish to Lead and Deadwood along Highway 14A winds through beautiful birch, aspen, oak, elm and ponderosa pine.

**Highway 44 west side of the Missouri River** – This stretch of road between Platte on the east and Winner on the west is notable for its oak valleys, Ball noted.

**Sica Hollow** – Located in northeastern South Dakota near Sisseton, Sica Hollow boasts beautiful red sumac and sugar maples. For a lofty vantage



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point, stop at the Nicollet Tower west of Sisseton. From the tower's observation deck, visitors can view the surrounding landscape and see three states.

**McCrary Gardens, Brookings** – “As you enter the garden there is an Autumn Blaze Maple – you can't miss it. It's probably one of the most photographed trees in the state,” said Ball.

**Newton Hills** – “The park has some terrain so you can stand on top and look across the valley at the changing colors,” said Ball of the state park south of Canton, S.D.

But for beauty and drama, there's one place for Ball.

“Hands down its Camden State Park,” said Ball.

For those wishing to bring some of the fall splendor to their own backyards, Ball has some advice.

“I wish people would buy trees more for their fall color than their spring flowers. Different species color at different times. You can have an extended color time from early September to late October by having a variety of trees,” said Ball.

## Did you know?

Conifers also experience a color change. Ball pointed out that evergreen trees are not “forevergreen.”

“The interiors of the pine trees will turn yellow and that's normal. The older needles on pine trees are changing colors and dropping,” said Ball.



**Above:** McCrary Gardens in Brookings provides visitors a vivid backdrop of fall colors. *Photo Courtesy South Dakota Tourism* **This page:** The Minnesota River Valley in western Minnesota in autumn splendor. *Photo Courtesy Minnesota Department of Tourism* **Cover:** Motorists in the Black Hills in western South Dakota are treated to beautiful drives. *Photo Courtesy South Dakota Tourism*

## Camden State Park

**Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative** in Tyler, Minn., takes special pride in nearby Camden State Park at Lynd, Minn.

For the past six years that cooperative has partnered with the park on a number of projects from trash clean up to installing electrical hook ups at one of the park's campsites.

“When state funding was cut, it made a big difference,” said Lyon-Lincoln Electric member services director Frank Spiczka, who spearheads the cooperative's work at the park.

The Lyon-Lincoln partnership with Camden State Park is one of several forged in Minnesota between cooperatives and state parks.

In 2006, 616 volunteers completed 2,431 hours of service at the state parks as part of the state's Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives' GreenTouch program. Since the program's inception, more than 4,000 volunteers have spent nearly 14,500 hours working to improve the parks.

The cooperative's most recent contribution has been to help install six electrical hook ups at the park's lower campground. Before work could commence, an archeological study had to be completed.

About a dozen people worked on the project in May, spending about 54 hours of volunteer service.

“This year because it was the electric project, the workers were more employees and spouses and the electrical contractor,” Spiczka said.

Camden State Park is located 10 miles southwest of Marshall, Minn., along Minnesota Highway 23 in the Redwood River valley. The park features 15 miles of trail, including a hike to an overlook for a fall color view.

For more information on Camden State Park, visit [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state\\_parks/camden/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/camden/index.html)

