

Arnold State Recreation Area

This small area's serenity makes it an attractive destination.

By Rocky Hoffmann

Depression, drought and dust swept into the small Custer County village of Arnold in the early 1930s, but in spite of failed crops, low farm prices and cattle having to survive on Russian thistle, the community as a whole thrived.

In fact, during this trying decade Arnold was known as Custer County's "Saturday night town." By early Saturday evening, folks from local farms and ranches would pack downtown streets, visiting with neighbors and spreading any recent news. While the movie theater filled to capacity for both the early and late shows, the new "state park" south of town was the daytime gathering spot to enjoy a picnic lunch, a brief nap under a cottonwood tree and usually a little fishing.

Arnold Park, now known as Arnold State Recreation Area (SRA), was the result of an agreement struck between the State Game Forestation and Park Commission and the village of Arnold to purchase a 40-acre parcel of land for \$1,000. The centerpiece of the new park was an 8-acre spring-fed, oxbow-like lake that was dammed and regulated at the outflow to achieve enough depth to support a panfish and bass fishery. Small rowboats and canoes were commonly seen on the little lake's quiet water.

Over the years, however, Arnold Lake began to suffer from dense aquatic vegetation that caused both summer and winter fish loss. In addition, having always teetered on the shallow side of fish-supporting water depths, the influx of deep well irrigation in the South Loup River Valley further affected the fishery.

Excluding the small lake at Victoria Springs, Arnold Lake is the only water body that exists for more than 50 miles and is an important fishery for Lincoln, Logan and



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Arnold SRA offers camping and fishing opportunities in a scenic setting.

Custer counties, so in 1996 the village of Arnold, in cooperation with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, applied for a grant through the Nebraska Environmental Trust to restore it. The resulting \$80,000 restoration focused on dredging a deeper pool and expanding the lake, which had shrunk to less than four surface acres. Following the dredging operation, the Commission renovated the fishery and stocked it with bluegill, channel catfish and largemouth bass.

Victoria Springs Park Superintendent Russ Wilkie, with assistance from the village of Arnold, maintains the Arnold SRA. Over the years, local service organizations and volunteer groups have extended a meaningful helping hand for infrastructure development and beautification of the park. Most recently, the Arnold Rotary sponsored the construction of a fishing pier that extends over the lake's deepest pool. Other improvements have included the construction of a new concrete boat ramp and utilization of the old ramp materials as riprap for fish habitat. Brush piles have been added and vegetation control mats

interspersed along the shoreline allow bank angler access.

The true attraction to the area, however, is its serenity and off the beaten path setting. Mature cottonwoods drape the area and electrical hookups accommodate 30 campsites, with room for more campers as well if electricity isn't an issue. Three water hydrants are scattered around the lake, along with two vault latrines. A playground is located on the north side of the lake and a camper dump station is near the park entrance on Highway 40.

Located just outside Arnold city limits, grocery supplies, gasoline and other necessities are readily available from the amiable folks of this very hospitable South Loup River Valley community. ■



Arnold SRA is located just south of Arnold in Custer County and offers camping, fishing, hiking and picnicking facilities.