

Jeff Around Town – April 23rd, 2024

Otis: Ah, yes, Mark Morris, Percy Grainger's music at 7:45. Let's have a head out around town, Jeff, around town.

Jeff: Good morning, Otis.

Otis: That would be you.

Jeff: That would be me, popping in.

Otis: Yeah, popping up.

Jeff: A little pop-up.

Otis: What's up?

Jeff: Well, Otis, when you want to get away, you know, off the grid, that you don't have a chance to travel that far, where do you go?

Otis: My room.

Jeff: Your room.

Otis: I have my choice of two rooms, actually.

Jeff: Your private...

Otis: Close the door, turn out the lights.

Jeff: Well, if you live in the Omaha Council Bluffs area, there's a place closer than you think that can transport you to a distant land and maybe even take you back in time. Now, as you know, it's been incredibly windy lately. Are you a fan of the wind?

Otis: I love the wind.

Jeff: Do you?

Otis: They call it Mariah out here.

Jeff: I think the wind is generally pretty annoying, and I've heard a lot of people saying that.

Otis: It's tiring. No, it tires you out.

Jeff: It really is.

Otis: It tires you out. Yeah.

Jeff: Well, and I can't remember it being this windy in so many days in a row. Not as windy today, a beautiful day, but... So I was in this magical place recently, not far from Omaha Council Bluffs area, on a really windy day. It was so windy, I was worried that my new hat

would blow away and, you know, mess up my hair and... Well, okay, never mind on that part. But what if I were to tell you that you have the wind to thank for transporting you to that far off magical land? It's a place...

Otis: Delaware.

Jeff: Well, a little closer than that. It's a place where you might've encountered woolly mammoth, camel, giant beaver, giant sloths. Do you ever go to a place and imagine what it was like, you know, 20,000 years ago? Well, here in the Midwest during the last ice age, glaciers ground rock into fine silt and eventually strong winds and dust clouds came along and formed dunes that were eventually stabilized by grass. And again, this place is so close to the Omaha area...

Otis: The Loess Hills.

Jeff: You can see the downtown skyline from there. Yes. And first I have to say that the place that has the deepest and most extreme deposits of this fine soil on earth is in an area of China. But coming in second place, and it's a place I often go to when I want... Like I went the other day, it's this area stretching along the Missouri River in Iowa known as the Loess Hills. So, you know, people...

Otis: Sorry, I gave that away.

Jeff: Well, no, no, no, that's okay. And you hear different pronunciations of it. And it's a little confusing because it's L-O-E-S-S. And do you know what that means? It's a German word.

Otis: Oh, is it?

Jeff: And yes, it means the soil that creates these hills or something like that in German. So...

Otis: Leave it to us Germans.

Jeff: Well, and speaking of...

Otis: It's a coin to catch you.

Jeff: That's right. Well, speaking of Germany, these deep loess deposits are also found in the Rhine River Valley. And the Rhine starts in the Swiss Alps, makes its way through Germany. Well, another river that starts in the Alps and goes through Germany is the Inn River. It's a tributary of the Danube.

Otis: And that goes into Innsbruck.

Jeff: Yes, Innsbruck, absolutely. So... And I know the river because I lived in Innsbruck. Have you been to Innsbruck?

Otis: I have never been.

Jeff: Well, it's beautiful. And you're in this valley surrounded completely by the Alps. And when I was living there... In fact, it was 10 years ago, last month that I had moved there,

spent a couple of years. And it's where I fell in love with hiking. Otis, you'd hike up to a mountain hut where you could get a cold Austrian beer and some sausage and sauerkraut. It was totally magical. And when I moved back to Omaha from Innsbruck, I was missing the Alps so much. I started hiking at the Hitchcock Nature Center.

Otis: Ah, yeah, up north.

Jeff: Yeah, just north of Crescent, Iowa.

Otis: Right.

Jeff: And for several years after moving back, I still had the same trekking poles and the hiking boots I had in Austria. And I am convinced, Otis, that alpine dirt from my trekking poles and hiking boots I had in Austria, I'm convinced that some of that dirt has been left behind in the Loess Hills.

Otis: In Hitchcock.

Jeff: In Hitchcock Nature Center. So now when I want to get away, I headed to Hitchcock Nature Center. And I imagine I'm in Austria or in prehistoric Iowa encountering giant sloths and encountering woolly mammoths. So, the next time you're feeling stressed or agitated, take a break in the Iowa Alps or the Loess Hills. And it's possible that you might step on one of those crumbs of dirt from Austria. And if you haven't been, it's super easy to get to. If you're leaving Omaha, you go up I-29 to the Crescent exit, head over to Crescent, head north about four or five miles, and there you are. Also, I want to mention there's an equal access boardwalk through the woods at Hitchcock Nature Center.

Otis: I've been up there. It's really something.

Jeff: It's beautiful.

Otis: Now Innsbruck, on the other hand, you have a frozen ice man up in the hills there.

Jeff: Yes.

Otis: They do.

Jeff: Yes.

Otis: They did.

Jeff: And the ski jump from the Olympics. You can still see it. And they practice in the summer. They have artificial turf.

Otis: I don't want to know. Those people are nuts.

Jeff: It sounds a little dangerous.

Otis: Well, about town, actually, he cheated. He went out of town.

Jeff: Well, you can still see the downtown skyline from there.

Otis: That's true. Point taken. All right. Point taken. Jeff, around town, from time to time here on KVNO.