

## Cold Colors

*By Pete Clark*

White is the obvious color of winter and noting the obvious is fine for the beginning of a discussion, but the not so obvious is usually much more interesting to observe. The ground can be covered with white snow under a deep blue sky with a brightly shining sun and low gray clouds hugging the horizon. A narrow stream could be winding its way through the snow, silvery water shining through the crevice created by pale sapphire ice extending towards the creek's center from each of its banks and the brown stalks of willows reaching up through the snow on both banks; and just beyond are the white skeletons of hibernating aspens brought to the fore by the black blotches running up and around their trunks and branches.

A long way from the creek an Interstate Highway might be lying across prairie, hills and a low mountain range, its traffic lanes at first white with fallen snow, then becoming a dirty brown from the passage of vehicles and the placing of sand, rock salt and calcium chloride on the road by snowplows having dump boxes on the rear, and the brown turns to gray as the blacktop begins to appear. With the passage of time the wet glittering lane surfaces may dry or may become elongated arenas of black ice and become extremely dangerous, and even more so with a high wind blowing the snow, creating a thoroughfare of polished glass.

In the mountain range the roadbed might be cut through the crest of a ridge to lessen the angles that must be traversed in crossing the foothills. During a snowfall and after the storm has moved on, reds, oranges, yellows and a thin seam of black anthracite coal are to be seen pushing their way through the thin snow that has adhered to the walls of the excavated passage. As the highway moves on through the highlands, pine trees show the green undersides of their snow covered boughs and elk in their dark brown winter coats engage in their never ending search for food.

On the plains away from the mountains you might find brownish gray cottontails foraging for life-sustaining vegetation or simply sunning themselves in the snow on the south sides of hills seeking warmth on subzero days. The rabbits must be alert, for gray coated coyotes may be in the area looking, listening and sniffing in search of potential meals. Prairie dogs may come out of their boroughs in search of grasses and roots and are the main source of food for the golden eagle and other raptors, their tan fur standing out against the white snow.

The late afternoon sun may create a golden hue across snow covered land, intensifying as the sun sinks nearer to the horizon and disappearing when the sun has gone.

The deep cold of winter can create colors of its own. The dense air can make colors starkly darker emphasizing depth and distance.