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Twenty-eight Elk Drown After Falling Through Ice

by Calvin Olsen

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at Lucky Peak Reservoir,
January 2004.
The ice is thick enough to stand
the weight of a few, if far
between (strength in numbers
remains dependent on strategy).
Herds plunge into the water
year after year, beating their way
to the shoreline with their hooves.
However, a particularly bitter
season of snowfall condensed the ice,
rendering it unbreakable.
Somewhere between instinct and panic,
hypothermia set in, lethargically killing
them as a full moon clung to the spillway.
From the cliffs the frozen tomb
looks like a muddy footprint, toe pointed
toward the highway, corpses lining
the perimeter—the only evidence
that providence lies buried somewhere
underneath 28,800 acre-feet²
of recreational water storage.
They're still there,
floating bloated in the Idaho
sun.

They'll bob all afternoon, but
overnight the surface water
freezes, solidifying
each carcass a little farther away
from the others, like continents.