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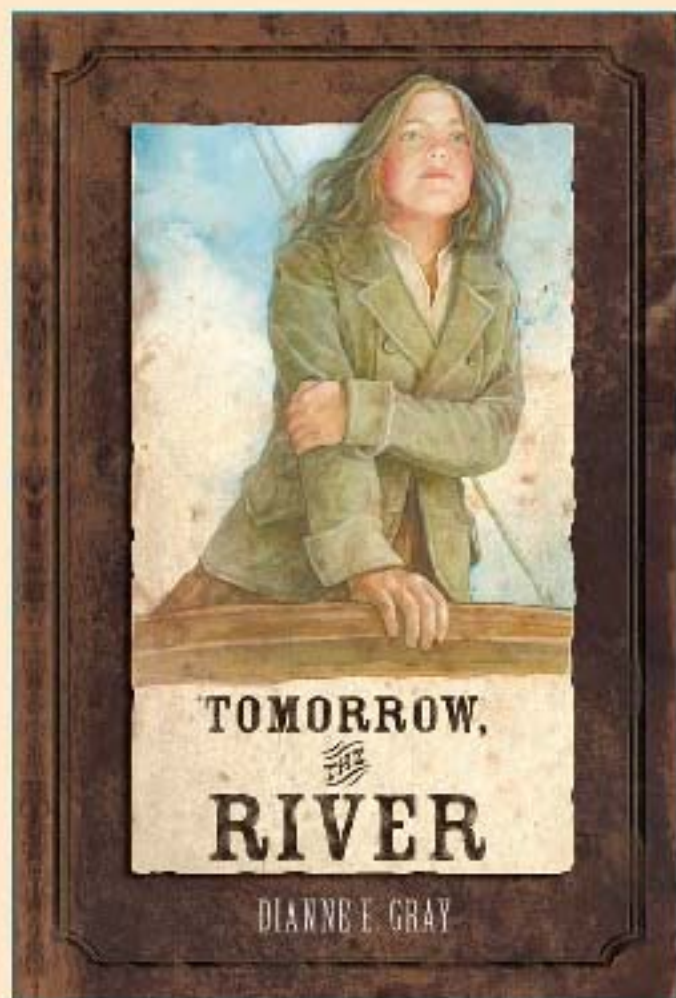
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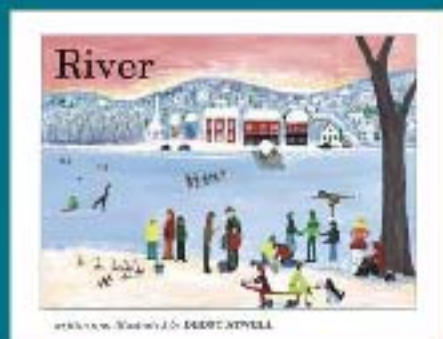
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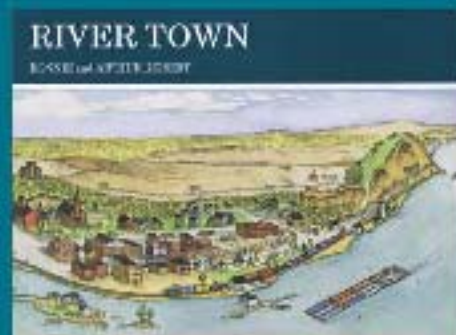
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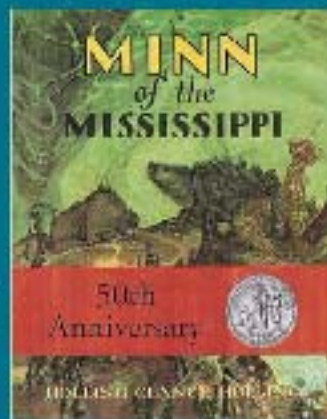
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November-December 2006



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Cover: Mike Rosen of Minneapolis took this photograph from the bluff overlooking Lake Pepin, between Stockholm and Maiden Rock, Wis.

Above: Ice forms off the Mississippi shore near Glen Haven, Wis., in Pool 10. (Tisha Sandberg)



From the Riverbank

Reggie McLeod
Editor/Publisher

TIPPING A SNAPPER

In late September I spent a couple of warm and sunny days walking from Winona, Minn., to La Crosse, Wis. I started at my doorstep, crossed the river at Winona, spent the night at the Trempealeau Hotel and ended at Riverside Park in La Crosse. With the exception of a harrowing route through north La Crosse, I followed trails and railroad tracks. I was bouncy and excited when I left, but 35 miles later I was a happy, blistered zombie.

Late in the morning of the first day I was following a railroad track across the big wetlands on the edge of the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge, startling flocks of pelicans and waterfowl. I was intrigued by a trail of empty plastic water bottles placed about 20 feet apart for the last several miles. Squinting into the distance, I spotted something on one of the rails. As I got closer, I saw it was a big snapping turtle balanced solidly on the right rail. Why does the snapper cross the rail? There was plenty of water on both side of the tracks.

As I closed the gap I talked to it to see if it was alive. I sometimes talk to animals, but to date none have spoken back to me. That doesn't mean that they don't understand. There are political reasons for not responding. If animals started responding to compliments, advice and admonitions, pretty soon we'd be trying to boss the wild animals around, and they know it.

My snapper clawed at the air with its front legs. I paused to admire its position. It wouldn't be an easy task to climb up on that rail in such a way

that you would be so perfectly balanced on it. This track is seldom used, so this snapper might have been perched on this rail for a couple of days or just a few minutes — there was no way for me to tell, and the turtle wasn't about to tell me. I've never been able to read a broad spectrum of emotions in the body language and facial expression of a snapping turtle, just hostility, panic and wary watchfulness. However, I think I caught a glint of awkward embarrassment in that reptilian eye.

(Looking back, I can see that possibly a bottled-water-swilling sadist had carefully balanced that snapper on the rail. Perhaps as I considered the situation, he or she was just up the line, out of sight, guzzling yet another bottle of water then placing it carefully next to the track with a crooked grin on his or her face.)

Snapping turtles are one of nature's tough guys (or gals), but in this situation I would bet on the train. I paused for a little bit before acting. I recognized this situation. How many times have I felt like I was kicking and clawing at the air, stuck in place while feeling the faint vibrations of a distant threat drawing closer?

Could the snapper have tipped itself off that rail? Perhaps if it waved all its legs forward then backwards in a steady rocking rhythm, like swimming the breaststroke in air. I really think this would work. It would certainly be fun to watch. And, it might be a useful skill for a snapping turtle on the wrong side of the tracks to learn, but not today.

Big River™

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I tipped the snapper off the rail with my toe. It was either exhausted or not about to be rushed, because it just sat there with its long armored tail draped across the rail. When I gave the tail a little nudge, the snapper twirled around hissing, jaws stretched wide ready to take a piece out of my shoe. I had half a mind to put it back on that rail.

I didn't wait for a thank you, but I did say "you're welcome," and headed off to Trempealeau as the snapper watched me warily. 🐢

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River News

Short and Successful

Buffalo City, Wis. — A second drawdown in Pool 5 (Buffalo City to Alma, Wis.) was cut short last summer by dry weather and low river flows, but early results are very encouraging.

“The pool looks excellent,” said Tim Schlagenhaft, Mississippi River coordinator for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

People who use the pool have been commenting that the water is clearer and the ducks are staying longer, but wildlife managers are also pleased with the apparent boost in plant life and the proliferation of wildlife, including frogs and dragonflies. Waterfowl hunters reported excellent results last year and this year.


This spring managers plan to complete an extensive report on the changes in the pool, which will be made available to the public.

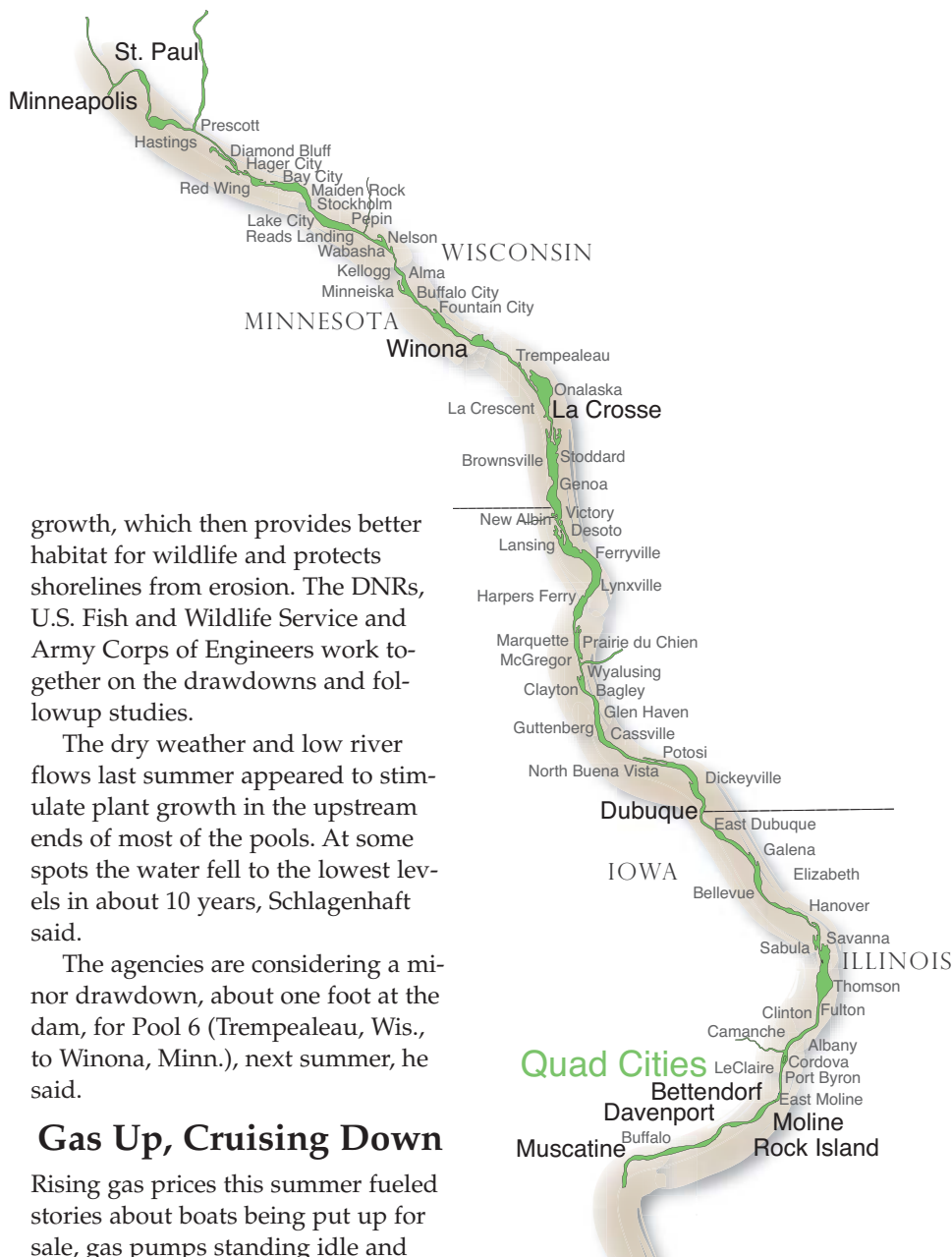
Last year islands were created and backwater channels were dredged in

Drawdowns stimulate plant growth, which then provides better habitat for wildlife and protects shorelines from erosion.

Spring Lake, just below Buffalo City, during the initial drawdown. Another drawdown started in mid June, last summer, but just about nine days after the water level was lowered by 1.5 feet at Lock and Dam 5, the drawdown had to be cancelled and the water level raised. A tow in the pool was grounded at about the same time, but the grounding was not related to the drawdown, noted Schlagenhaft.

Drawdowns stimulate plant

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growth, which then provides better habitat for wildlife and protects shorelines from erosion. The DNRs, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Army Corps of Engineers work together on the drawdowns and followup studies.

The dry weather and low river flows last summer appeared to stimulate plant growth in the upstream ends of most of the pools. At some spots the water fell to the lowest levels in about 10 years, Schlagenhaft said.

The agencies are considering a minor drawdown, about one foot at the dam, for Pool 6 (Trempealeau, Wis., to Winona, Minn.), next summer, he said.

Gas Up, Cruising Down

Rising gas prices this summer fueled stories about boats being put up for sale, gas pumps standing idle and boaters partying dockside but not cruising much.

Sunset Marina in Rock Island, Ill., reported that gas sales were down this year, but not by much — about 9,500 gallons, 10 or 11 percent. The overall transient income was steady.

At Island City Harbor in Sabula, Iowa, Jerry Lawson reported that gas sales and transient business were less than half of last year's. People came to the marina, but about 75 percent of them didn't go out.

At the La Crosse (Wis.) Municipal Boat Harbor, gas sales were down 40 percent compared to the last two years, while traffic was down 10 percent.

At Parkside Marina in Wabasha, Minn., traffic was similar to recent years, although overnight traffic was down and gas sales were down 30 percent compared with the last two years. It was the worst year in ten years for marina revenue.

Treasures of the Mississippi

Panoramas & Poetic Reflections

By Abdul Karim Sinno, Ph.D.

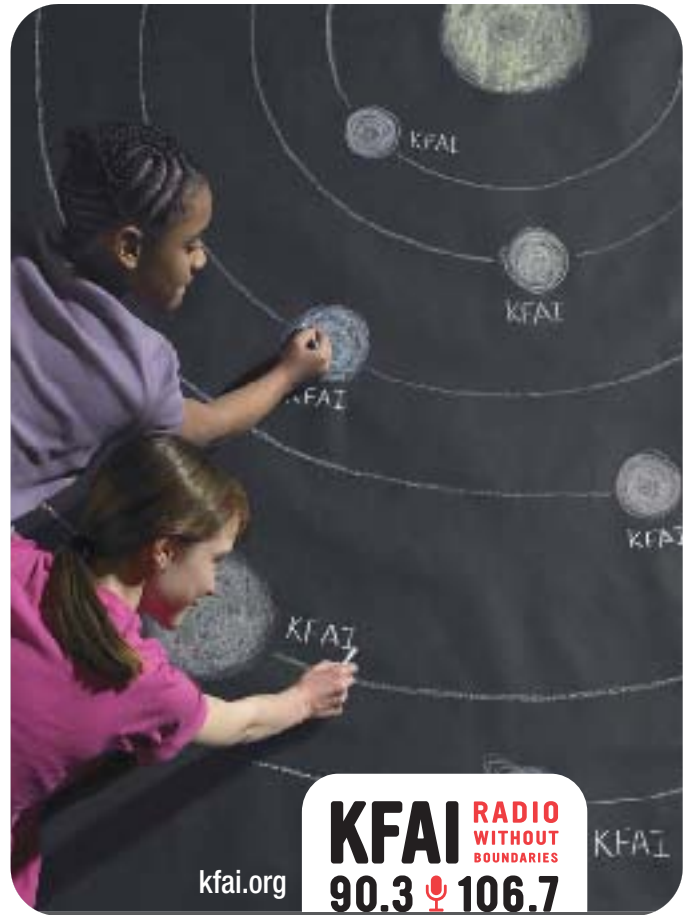


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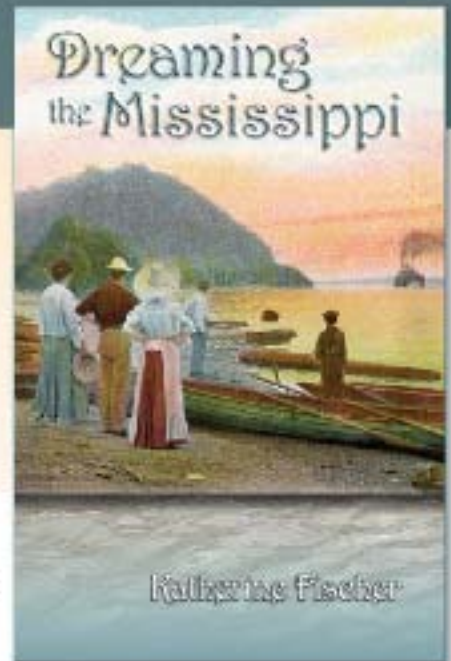
"*Dreaming the Mississippi* tells engaging tales about the complex relationship between humans and one of the great rivers. In the book, Kate Fischer gives voice to the wild soul of the Mississippi and to our own wild souls. 'Leave something untamed' is her bracing and welcome message."—Lorraine Andersen, author of *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture*

"Readers will find here an uncharacteristically frank account not only of the condition of the Mississippi River but of Fischer and her family's relationship to it. It is a fresh and refreshing view of life on, in, and near this great goddess of a river, written by a person who, it is clear, is deeply in love with it and with life."—Dan McGuiness, Director, Audubon Mississippi River Program

Offering a fresh perspective on the river's environment, industry, and recreation, *Dreaming the Mississippi* challenges old stereotypes through the experiences of modern Americans who work the barges, rope-swing into muddy bottoms, struggle against hurricane floodwaters, and otherwise find new meaning on this great watery corridor.

In an engaging voice, earnest and energetic, Katherine Fischer describes how the river's natural and human histories overlap and interweave as she tells of her own gradual immersion in its life—which led her to buy a house so close to its banks that each spring she must open her basement doors to accept its inevitable floods.

Through compelling words and photographs, *Dreaming the Mississippi* invites readers to taste life on today's Mississippi, as sweet, tangy, and wildly cantankerous as it gets. 216 pages, 37 illustrations, \$18.95 paper



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In **St. Paul, Watergate Marina** said its fuel sales were actually up 15 percent or more this season, in keeping with a trend toward a busier marina after remodeling and expansion in 2001. Traffic was up as well, even though 91 octane clear went for \$3.25 per gallon.

"It might have to do with people not taking the longer trips and staying near this part of the river as opposed to shooting over to the St. Croix like they used to," said manager Adam Wilson.

The **St. Paul Yacht Club** doesn't track sales by the gallon, but business manager Roger Anderson is sure that the club took fewer fuel deliveries this season than last — "definitely a downturn in the range of 20 percent in terms of the amount of gas we sold."

Anderson also saw less traffic at his marina during hot weather in July, although people were still on their boats. "People used them almost like a cabin," said Anderson. "They came down and sat on the boat. They used it but they didn't leave the slip."

Anderson reported hearing more people talking about selling boats because of uncertainty about fuel prices.

All marina operators agreed with Sabula Marina's Jerry Lawson, that stable gas prices at \$2.50 to 2.75 next summer would perk up boaters and marina revenues.

Safer Dam

Red Wing, Minn. — Eleven tows have collided with the gated part of Dam 3 since 1963, and deteriorated dikes nearby could fail and lower Pool 3 to the point that two nuclear power plants would have to be shut down for lack of cooling water, according to the Army Corps of Engineers.

For years the Corps has been developing plans to make the tricky stretch of river upstream from the lock and dam safer for tows and to strengthen the dikes surrounding a backwater area on the Wisconsin side of the dam. The "Draft Integrated General Reevaluation Report and Environmental Impact Statement" for the \$64 million project was published

in August and the comment period ended October 6.

About half the funds would be spent extending the guidewall to the lock by 862 feet, which is on the Minnesota side upstream from Red Wing, and dredging above the dam to reduce the outdraft — the current that pulls downstream-bound tows away from the lock and toward the dam gates. The rest would be spent rebuilding embankments to prevent the river from cutting a channel on the Wisconsin side of the dam.

A plan proposed in 1999 was criticized for disturbing a species-rich mussel bed just below the dam. The new plan would reduce the impact on those mussel beds, according to the report.

Danger of Drink

La Crosse, Wis. — Since 1997, eight college-age men have drowned in La Crosse. Six of the men were missing until their bodies were found in the river. The most recent victim, Lucas Homan, 21, was pulled from the Mis-

Each drowning fueled rumors of a serial killer, but no signs of foul play were discovered in any of the cases of missing victims.

issippi Oct. 2 near Riverside Park, downtown. Tests indicated that he had a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.32 percent. He was seen at several downtown bars two days earlier, according to the *La Crosse Tribune* (10-5-2006).

Each drowning fueled rumors of a serial killer, but no signs of foul play were discovered in any of the cases of missing victims. Alcohol was a factor in all of them.

The city and universities are discussing a range of possible responses, from better alcohol education to patrols to barriers between downtown and the river.

Basket Handle Twin

Quad Cities — The public and a design team both unanimously chose what is known as a "basket handle true arch twin bridge" from four different designs for the proposed new

If it's built, it will be the only true arch bridge across the Mississippi.

I-74 bridge between Moline and Bettendorf. The structure would have a twin deck with four arches towering over it. If it's built, it will be the only true arch bridge across the Mississippi.

The Illinois and Iowa departments of transportation are jointly planning the bridge and the highway corridor.

Citizens indicated they wanted a "signature" bridge and indicated esthetics were very important, but there were practical reasons for the choice. Twin decks provide flexibility during construction, allow for efficient deck replacement and, according to the Department of Homeland Security, a double-span bridge is a more difficult target for terrorists.

The entire corridor project through Moline and Bettendorf, including the bridges, is estimated to cost about \$671 million. The design team is working to complete the environmental impact study and should know by next summer if they will get a federal green light.


Spring Sale

Minneapolis — You can't call it a land grab, because no one seems to be grabbing for a historic 27.3 acre parcel of land between the Mississippi River and historic Fort Snelling. The property, formerly home to the U.S. Bureau of Mines Twin Cities Research Center, is up for sale. The research center closed about 10 years ago, and the government wants to sell the land to a government agency (not federal), Indian tribe, college or university. If nobody buys it, it may be offered to private parties.

Early settlers used the blufftop site, which includes the still-flowing Camp Coldwater Spring, which is not

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considered potable. Some tribes have made cultural and historical claims to the site that have yet to be confirmed by the National Park Service. In a year or more, the Park Service will complete an environmental impact statement, and the Department of the Interior will make a final decision on the fate of the property.

The site includes 11 buildings, all aging and in disrepair, which would have to be torn down and removed.

Tit for Tat

Keithsburg, Ill. — The saga of development in this small river town began when developer Guy L. Brenkman moved in, bought property, began developing it, opened businesses, provided a caboose for a tourist attraction, promised a locomotive and began planning a new marina. Then he opened a bar and restaurant called Bikinis with topless servers.

People complained to city officials, and Brenkman topped the servers.

Now Brenkman has closed Bikinis, stopped work, boarded his renovation projects and listed them for sale. He posted signs blaming activist religious groups for the situation that he claims will cost the city significant tax revenue. He also vowed to bulldoze Bikinis, which would effectively eliminate any chance of developing the site because of new federal flood plain standards.

Steve Nylin, the city's economic development coordinator, said Brenkman has a history of buying, developing and selling properties. The city recently received the necessary permits for a marina, and they have been talking to other developers.

Brenkman did not respond to a request for information for this article.

Off Duty

Savanna, Ill. — In September, the Eagles Landing Development portion of the former Savanna Army Depot officially became a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ). Under the direction of the Jo-Carroll Foreign Trade Zone Board, it will help businesses, both on-site and within a 60-mile radius to eliminate, reduce, delay or defray duty charges on material brought into the area

from outside of the country.

When taxable raw materials are brought into the zone, converted into a final product and shipped from there, the raw material will become duty-free.

The FTZ's hired consultant has begun talks with several companies that might benefit from the designation.

David Ylinen, executive director of the Jo-Carroll Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) at the depot says the whole purpose of obtaining the FTZ status was to bring jobs to the area.

"These sites are fairly common at large manufacturing centers, like auto plants, and to bring jobs here, we need to make the best use of our land."

There are about 2,900 acres on the site along the Mississippi River, but the Army has transferred only 850 acres, due to ongoing environmental cleanup and reclamation work.

Repair It or Else

East Moline, Ill. — A survey of damaged river levees and related problems from silt, erosion and animal burrows will be completed in East Moline this fall. Construction and repair is expected to begin next spring.

Storm sewer rates will increase slightly to pay for repairs that the Corps of Engineers has rated as "minimally acceptable." If the city does not repair the levee and other drainage problems, its rating could go down, and it could lose federal flood assistance.

Dam Public Input

Madison, Wis. — The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must inform the public of changes in the way water flows are managed on a stretch of the St. Croix River, a tributary to the Mississippi, as a result of a court-approved agreement between the DNR and the nonprofit River Alliance of Wisconsin late this summer.

The Alliance had challenged the DNR's "Memorandum of Understanding" with Xcel Energy, which owns and runs the St. Croix Falls hydropower dam. The memorandum, they charged, was private, could not be enforced and provided no means

Letter to the Editor

I was sitting at my car dealership today waiting on a small car repair and thumbed through the magazines when I found your beautiful *Big River* magazine. That book brought back a million memories and stories. My entire family has commercially fished at one time or another from Savanna, Ill., to Stoddard, Wis. We set lines, used turtle traps, pulled seines and on our days off we were out there with a rod and reel or a minnow net to get bait or with a shotgun after ducks. That river was my home every day.

In the 1960s and 1970s I was secretary-treasurer of a 5-state commercial fishing organization that tried to halt the Corps of Engineers and the Wisconsin Dept. of Conservation from damaging the river with pollution, sedimentation, runoff and the like. I hate to say it, but I'm the last living officer of the Upper Mississippi Valley Fisheries Council, and almost all commercial fishermen have gone the way of the Dodo bird. The river 40 years ago was lush and fertile, the backwaters were full of panfish, clams, otters, beavers and ducks. There used to be so many bullfrogs they would drown out your voice. The egret rookery below the Genoa dam was so large it covered miles.


Today it's a different story. Many of the islands are gone the back waters are silted in and the pollution is terrible. Panfish have parasites, other fish are full of mercury and God only knows what else.

I just wanted to say how much I adore the idea of the attention you are giving to the great Mississippi.

Linda J. Bousman
Westby, Wis.

Big River welcomes letters to the editors. Send yours to **Big River**, PO Box 204, Winona, MN 55987; or email to editors@big-river.com.

for public involvement. The world's only reproducing population of the federally-endangered winged maple-leaf mussel makes its home below the dam.

The settlement also requires water level monitoring, which will be available through the U.S. Geological Survey website or the River Alliance website. 

Court Okays Condos

Dubuque, Iowa — The developer who started excavations for a 64-unit condominium called Eagle Villa below the sheer face of Eagle Bluff in Dubuque in 2003 said he is in no hurry to continue, even though the Iowa Supreme Court has cleared the way. When developer A.J. Spiegel does proceed with his plan, it's likely to be a scaled-down version, due to the costs of stabilizing the bluff face,

Visit www.big-river.com for links to information about stories marked with the mouse .

which was damaged during his earlier excavation.

The group that opposes the condo plan, Preserve Our Bluffs, protested that Eagle Bluff is a much-loved city

The group that opposes the condo plan, Preserve Our Bluffs, protested that Eagle Bluff is a much-loved city landmark that should not be marred with a large private development.

landmark that should not be marred with a large private development. It sued the city and accused Mayor Terry Duggan of a conflict of interest for meetings with Spiegel.

Excavation of Eagle Bluff ceased, and the project remained in limbo for three years. Meanwhile, the city hired engineers to analyze and propose a solution to the destabilization problem caused by the excavation. In late


September, the Supreme Court ruled that the district court should have dismissed the case because opponents did not file a key writ on time.

If the project had gone ahead, it would have produced \$1 million a year in property taxes — more than enough to repair the bluff, according to Spiegel. (*Dubuque Telegraph Herald*, 9-30-06)

New Islands & Beaches

La Crosse, Wis. — By the time the third phase of a five-phase plan is complete, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the Army Corps of Engineers and state agencies will have constructed 33 new islands to offset damage from erosion in Pool 8, which stretches from Dresbach, Minn., to Genoa, Wis. Thirteen islands have been built so far. The newest three lie just south of Stoddard, where Coon Creek enters the Mississippi, where they will shield the creek delta from waves and wind.

Two of the islands are open to public hunting, while the third is



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closed until the fill settles, according to the FWS.

Beach-goers will be happy to know that several popular beaches in Pool 11 (between Guttenberg and Dubuque, Iowa) will be rehabilitated. One of the beaches is in the Million Dollar Island area between river mile 610.5 and 611. Another is Ball's Island Beach, also known as Waupeton Beach, at river mile 599.

River Time

Prescott, Wis. — It keeps good time and chimes the hours, but from a new location. A historic Seth Thomas clock is now settled in a new brick tower near the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers, thanks to volunteers who donated money, time and materials.

The original clock tower was part of a school in 1887. When the school burned down in 1935, it took up residence in another school. In 2003, the clock and its bell, which hadn't worked for 20 years, were removed. Resident Jerry Voje, who said he'd fixed a few cuckoo clocks over the years, volunteered to try to fix it. When he did, the Prescott Historical Society suggested the idea of the tower.

The four-faced clock, which stands six feet tall and weighs 450 pounds, is now installed in a new, \$130,000 tower, funded by donations from the Prescott Foundation, local citizens and merchants. The historical society donated the tower to the city. The city provided land near the Highway 10 Bridge on the bank of the St. Croix River and insures the structure.

Voje said they have fielded a few complaints about the 350-pound bell and its 50-pound hammer: "Some people want the chimes to be louder so they can hear it over the downtown noise."

Prize for Shooting Rat

Prairie du Chien, Wis. — Neil Rettig has shot a lot of wildlife in the last 30 years, and he's bagged quite a few trophies. In September he was awarded his fourth television Emmy award for outstanding individual achievement in cinematography for the film,



The old clock stands in a new tower in Prescott, Wis. (Ethan Beurskens)

"Mississippi: Tales from the Last River Rat," which was produced by the BBC and the Discovery Channel. The film featured author-trapper-storyteller Kenny Salwey and was based on Salwey's book of the same name.

Little Jamaica

Hager City, Wis. — Boaters cruising downriver past Hager City can't miss the new artwork. Jamaican artist Kevin "King" Pinto painted Mississippi River murals on two sides of the Harbor Bar and Restaurant this summer — with egrets, eagles, fish, boaters, back channels and local favorite places — but with a decidedly tropical feel, with bright colors, shimmering blue waters and orange sunsets.

"King called me all excited at a Packers Game on my cell phone to tell me that people were posing for photos with their rods in front of the picture of the leaping bass, as if they were reeling it in, within an hour after he finished it," said Harbor owner Brad Smith.

Smith, who has a home in Jamaica,

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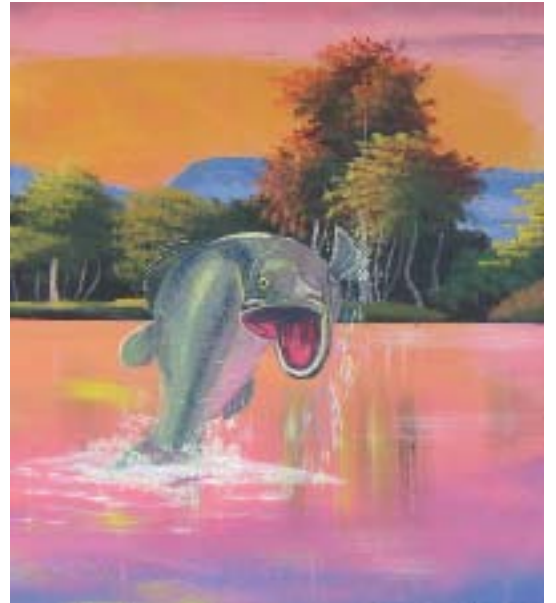
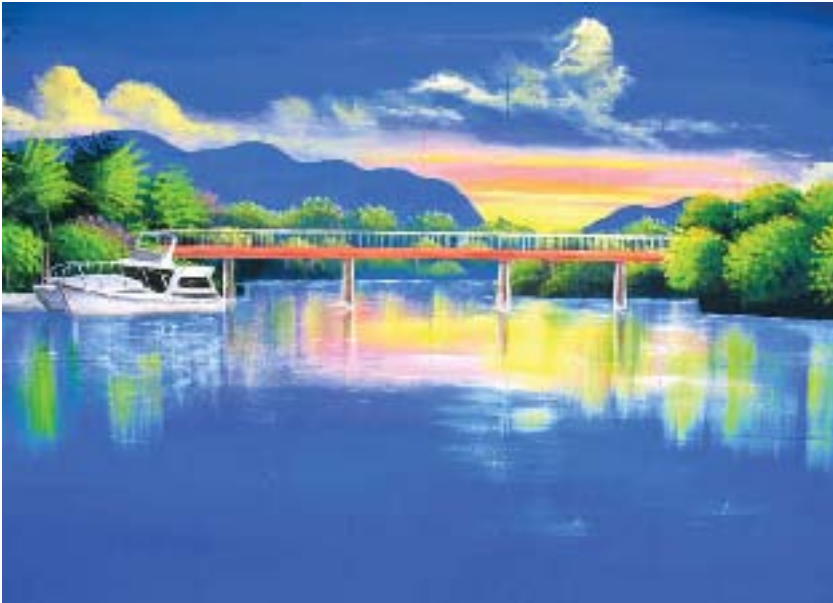
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When painted by a Jamaican artist, Kevin "King" Pinto, the Upper Mississippi takes on a distinctly tropical look in these murals, three of several he painted last summer in Hager City, Wis. (Ethan Beurskens)

said he first met Pinto, now 27, when the Jamaican was an 8-year-old hustling tourists on a beach. "He sang and danced for the tourists, collected bottles, and sold his pictures for a living," Smith said. He bought a draw-

ing of a boy kicking a soccer ball from Pinto, and encouraged him to paint tropical scenes.

Pinto, a runaway living on his own, eventually worked his way through art school in Jamaica. He vis-

ited Smith last August and was hired to paint the mural. In keeping with the theme, the Harbor features some Jamaican foods, and hires Jamaican workers through a government guest worker program.



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New Attractions

Onalaska, Wis. — A federal grant of \$563,000 will give a boost to Wisconsin's Great River Road. Most of the grant will fund the purchase of waterfront land in Onalaska, where a new tourism and archeology center is planned. About \$57,000 will pay for a scenic deck and photography platform at Brown's Marsh, on Lake Onalaska.

The center is envisioned as a combination tourism center and archeological learning center that will display and house prehistoric artifacts from the Upper Mississippi region.

"We're getting our partners together and putting the board together now," said Jean Lunde, city tourism director. "The center will be built on the waterfront on Highway 35, which is the Great River Road, although the precise location hasn't been determined yet."

They hope to begin construction in 2008, she said.

Meanwhile, a proposed \$6-million interpretive and environmental educational center near Grandview, Iowa, will have a Native American-inspired design, be built partly underground, and feature a U-shape and a wickiup-style roof. The center will be constructed on the grounds of the 92-acre Langwood environmental learning center. Grandview is on Highway 61 just south of Muscatine. Organizers

hope the center's location and unique design will make it a national draw for visitors, and be sustainable to operate. The next step is fund raising.

In Wabasha, Minn., the Wabasha Port Authority won a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for equipment and displays at the new National Eagle Heritage Cen-

Visitors to Alma, Wis., should be able to watch eagles from indoors and from a deck just below Lock and Dam 4 this winter.

ter, which began construction in August. The new center is expected to attract three or four times the number of visitors that the current one draws.

Visitors to Alma, Wis., should be able to watch eagles from indoors and from a deck just below Lock and Dam 4 this winter. Wings Over Alma is scheduled to open in November or December downtown in a building that will eventually include a viewing area, visitors center, gift shop and Chamber of Commerce office. Telescopes and binoculars will be available.

Often as many as 100 eagles feed in the open water below the dam in the winter.



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More Nuke Waste

St. Paul — In late September, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission unanimously approved Xcel Energy's plan to store highly radioactive nuclear waste in 30 above-ground containers near the Monticello power plant. The plant sits on the Mississippi River about 25 miles northwest of the Twin Cities. Xcel

It also argued that nuclear power is the best way to supply low-priced electricity without the pollution caused by coal-burning plants.

claimed the storage is needed to prolong the life of the plant for another 20 years. It also argued that nuclear power is the best way to supply low-priced electricity without the pollution caused by coal-burning plants.

The Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, among other groups, voiced strong questions about the health, safety and environmental effects of storing spent fuel in concrete casks, but the proposal passed quietly. (*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 9-30-06)

Island Football

Minneapolis — Neighbors still object, but the Minneapolis City Council approved a proposed high-school football stadium on Nicollet Island.

DeLaSalle High School won approval Sept. 22 for a new football stadium on the historic island opposite downtown Minneapolis. Opponents argue that stadium lights, noise and traffic will undercut the island's residential and historic areas.

The council's 8-4 vote for the 750-seat stadium came with a caution to mute lighting to protect neighbors and the river from the glare.

Opponents argue that the school has not considered other nearby locations for a stadium. Building the stadium on Nicollet Island turns public riverfront over to the private school, foes note, and changes the historic character of the island.

Winner of the River Lovers' Photo Contest



Anglers gather at the Pepin, Wis., boat launch during a fishing contest in April 2006. (Dennis Newton)

Send entries for the next contest to *Big River* by the deadline below. If we select your photo to print in these pages, we'll send you three free copies of the magazine to share with friends. The contest is open to amateurs and professionals, adults and kids. Email a digital JPEG (.jpg) photo file — high-resolution photos only, please! — to photos@big-river.com. Write "PHOTO CONTEST" in the subject line.

Or send a print to Photo Editor, *Big River*, P.O. Box 204, Winona, MN 55987. (We cannot return photographs, though.)

Include your name, address, phone number and a short description of the photograph — who or what it is, when and where it was taken, etc.

The deadline for the January-February 2007 issue is November 15, 2006.

DeLaSalle, a 106-year-old Catholic high school, counters that it, too, is a part of the island's history. The stadium will be built on school property and land owned by the Minneapolis Park Board. The park board will let the school use its land in exchange for DeLaSalle's promise to allow youth sports activities there.

The school and its alumni will pay for the \$3 million stadium, which requires further city permits.

Barge Power

Hastings, Minn. — A barge-based generator that produces electricity from river current may begin operating late next year in this rivertown.

The Hastings City Council agreed in October to let Hydro Green Energy LLC of Houston link the company's first commercial "hydropower turbine array" to the power grid near the city's hydro plant.

The floating technology "can create electricity from moving water but without a dam," said Wayne Krouse, Hydro Green Energy's chairman, CEO, founder and inventor.

The hydropower turbine array will produce 200 kilowatts of electricity. (In comparison, a typical coal-burner produces 500 megawatts — 2,500 times as much.) However, it has no fuel cost, burns no coal and has no emissions. It rests on a 15-foot by 24-

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The Hastings barge generator will run continuously, even in winter, said Krouse. Other such barges can be put in place to meet peak-demand periods and can be brought online in a minute or two, whereas thermal plants require three to six hours to power up for peak periods.

Hydro Green will pay about \$240,000 to place the generator. Hastings will incur no cost to have the power barge near its hydro plant, and it will share revenues from sale of the electricity with Hydro Green.

What's in it for the city? "It's more the public relations aspect of it, trying to find a new energy source," said John Zgoda, Hastings' public works superintendent.

The barge technology also works in tidal areas and ocean currents, but Hydro Green seeks river locations because the permitting process is clearer for rivers. Moreover, rivers tend to be close to existing power lines and transformers.

Krouse, a former Exxon chemical

engineer, seeks river locations that are "deep and swift. The higher the velocity of the water and the deeper it is, the more power we can produce." ☞

Begging Birds Barred

Moline, Ill. — People have long flocked to the Ben Butterworth Parkway, to feed ducks and geese. The parking lot is next to the walkway and the walkway runs along the river's edge. Some people don't even get

"Every year we find frozen birds that should have gone south," said Schick.

out of their cars, but just roll down the windows and throw out bread to attract crowds of begging birds.

The practice attracted big problems, too. Bird excrement posed a health problem for walkers, and required frequent and time-consuming clean ups. Many people avoided these bird-feeding areas. Then rats joined the buffet. Rodd Schick, park

operations manager, said the time had come for the popular practice to end.

In mid-September the Moline Park District asked people to stop feeding the birds. The district's low key approach emphasizes education rather than passing out tickets.

"We've even erected minimal signage so we don't distract from the beauty of the parkway," Schick said.

He said it is illegal in Illinois to feed bread, seeds or grain to waterfowl. Feeding them makes them dependent and alters their natural migratory patterns.

"Every year we find frozen birds that should have gone south," said Schick.

Divisive Bridges

St. Paul — The city is considering a proposal for a 30-acre, \$1.5-billion riverfront project, and community groups are lining up to fight it.

Supporters say the proposed development will be an economic boon, drawing visitors to downtown St.

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Paul and energizing the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Bridges, as local developer Jerry Trooien dubs his project, would include 1,100 residential units, 400,000 square feet of retail and a facility he calls Mythica — an “interac-

Opponents argue that the development would restrict access to the river, create traffic problems and block valued bluff-to-bluff views.

tive public attraction” that would feature “multimedia environments” and exhibits.

Opponents argue that the development would restrict access to the river, create traffic problems and block valued bluff-to-bluff views. They worry about filling the riverfront with private developments rather than keeping it accessible to the public. They note that residents spent years helping to draw up a comprehensive plan for the neighborhood known as the West Side. The plan includes a six-story height restriction that the proposed Bridges towers would violate.

“It’s ‘the Flats’ for a reason,” said Whitney Clark, executive director of the Friends of the Mississippi River, an advocacy group based in St. Paul. The plan, he said, “protects the scenic views and historic landscape.”

Developer Trooien countered that even a six-story building hides the bluff, so why not make it 30 stories?

Trooien will face pressure to adapt the Bridges to fit with St. Paul’s initiative to treat its entire riverfront as a park (see “Big Park” story in this issue). He takes the big park idea to task as well. “I think that’s silly,” he said. “What are you going to do? Blow up the existing 700,000 square feet of office that’s already here?”

The park plan allows for developed areas such as Trooien’s existing riverfront office buildings near the proposed development, but encourages new development to fit into a parklike setting.

The Bridges proposal is wending

its way through the city hall screening process. It requires a final vote by the city council that may come before the end of 2006.

Armada Suspended

Quad Cities — Originally bound for New Orleans, the Miss Rockaway Armada will winter in the Quad Cities.

This group of 16 to 33 young people lived, travelled, and performed on the Mississippi during the summer. Their boat — three tied-together, home-made, eclectic wooden rafts, constructed of and decorated with all manners of salvaged items — looks like nothing you’ve ever seen before on the river. The origin of the project’s name, “The Miss Rockaway Armada,” is a bit elusive. “It is a long story,” said a troop member.



According to their website, the Miss Rockaway Armada will winter at a marina in Andalusia, Ill. (Gary Kramer)

Despite the face paint, head adornments, unusual costumes, no last names and a constantly shifting crew, they emphasize they are not hippies, as a local newspaper reported, but artists and performers who sustain themselves with their creative endeavors. For the summer, they elect to live freely and healthily and try to connect with the river and the people they meet. At night, wherever they end up, they perform on the “stage” that is the roof of one of the rafts.

By late September, it was getting cold, their craft had suffered damage in Pool 13, the two Volkswagen Rabbit engines converted to run on biodiesel were balky and suffering from cold fuel, and members were ready to return to their personal artistic endeavors. They were looking for a place to winter their vessel. 🌊 🚣

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Could the St. Paul Riverfront Become a Really Big Park?

Proposed National Great River Park would weave city and river, industrial and natural areas



Trails line much of St. Paul's riverfront.

Story by Marc Hequet

Photographs by Brian Gardner

Civic boosters are trumpeting the idea of turning St. Paul's entire 26 miles of riverfront into what they call the National Great River Park. They want St. Paul to exploit its standing as the river-straddling capital of the headwaters state — the “gateway to the Mississippi,” as the proposed park's promotional literature styles it.

Park backers think treating the full riverfront as a park will encourage developers to create more river-friendly projects. Touting the river may also draw more tourists — including eco-tourists who come to see a clean river, great blue herons flapping heedlessly over the trees and bald eagles soaring on high.

Stretching for 17 miles along the Mississippi River — including nine miles in which the city lies on both banks — St. Paul claims 26 miles of riverfront, more than any other community on the big river.

People in St. Paul migrate to the river in all seasons. Even when the first snowflakes drift through the air, runners will be trotting along the tree-lined riverfront paths near St. Thomas University on East River Road. Nature lovers will still be crossing the wooden walkway over the flood plain at Crosby Farm Natural Area. Dogs will be chasing sticks into the cold water on the beach across the river from Hidden Falls Park. And on warm winter days, lunchtime

strollers will venture out on the downtown riverfront promenade.

Neighborhood activist Carol Swenson drives every day across the Mississippi River where it widens from the gorge upstream into a broad valley. “It never ceases to amaze me what you can see,” said Swenson, “and just how special this place is.”

The idea of turning the entire vista into a park has met virtually no opposition, so far.

“Everyone can see that this is an asset,” said St. Paul City Council President Kathy Gantry, whose ward fronts on the Mississippi. “It's not like we're building any more rivers. This is it. We need to take care of what we have. You just can't re-create what na-



The riverfront near the Highway 52 bridge (in the background) is busy with towboats and barges.

ture has done so beautifully here.”

The city of St. Paul lies within the National Park Service’s 72-mile Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, noted Steven P. Johnson, acting superintendent of the MNRRA corridor. The park proposal, Johnson added, is “consistent with our vision for protecting natural resources along the Mississippi River and helping local governments do the right thing.”

Upstream Stewards

Environmentalists are cautiously hopeful about the plan. St. Paul neighborhood activist Jenny Winkelman’s first reaction was that the idea had promise — “but I wasn’t sure I trusted the motive,” she said. Winkelman feared “a kind of chamber of commerce approach instead of addressing the ecological value of the river and our response as an upstream steward.”

She was encouraged after participating in workshops set up to gather

neighborhood ideas and build support for the big park. “It felt like the concepts that were being promoted by environmentalists have been heard,” Winkelman said.

Some hope the park would lead to more conservation and restoration. Dan McGuinness, the Minnesota-based director of the Audubon Society’s Mississippi River program, was pleased that, in effect, “the city says not only in some places there should be no more development, but in some places habitat should be restored. It should be even more wild.”

Although much of the riverfront in this city of 300,000 is already park or parklike, with wild areas, trails and promenades, the city may acquire about 50 acres to complete the big park, and spend \$150 million over decades on restoration and other improvements. The plan would require signage to help people find their way to and along the river, for example, and more trails to link existing trails and “arrival points” with food con-

PARK THIS

St. Paul already has 7,744 acres of parks. City, county, state and federal parkland makes up than 21.5 percent of the city’s area.

Albuquerque, N.M., is the U.S. city with the most total parkland as percent of land area at 33,235 acres or 28.7 percent, says the Trust for Public Land. **San Diego** is second with 22 percent.

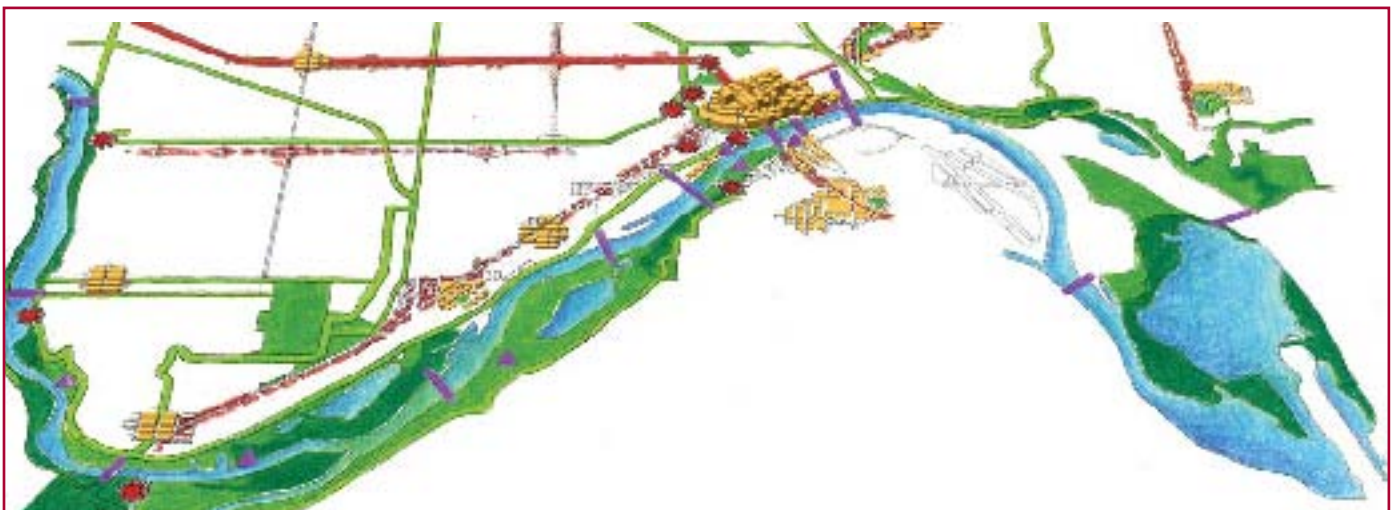
El Paso, Texas, is the U.S. city with the most parkland outright, at 24,000 acres, according to the Trust for Public Land. **Phoenix** is second. Its South Mountain Preserve is the nation’s biggest municipally owned park, at 16,283 acres.

The 72-mile *Mississippi National River and Recreation Area*, meanwhile, isn’t a park in the same sense as the parks at El Paso and Phoenix — but just for the record, it covers 54,000 acres, including the St. Paul riverfront.



Left, Just downriver from the Ford plant and Lock and Dam 1, a small waterfall spills over a ledge in Hidden Falls Park.

Below, Riverside park trails are busy all year with walkers and bikers in summer, walkers and skiers in winter.



In this artist's vision of the National Great River Park, neighborhoods are linked to the river with greenways and trails. (Courtesy of St. Paul Riverfront Corp.)

cessions and restrooms.

"We want to make sure every neighborhood in St. Paul is connected to the river," said Bob Bierscheid, St. Paul's director of parks and recreation.

Privately-owned riverfront parcels will stay in private hands, and further development will be allowed. But park backers, up to and including Mayor Chris Coleman, call for projects that are in keeping with the character of a riverfront park.

Who pays for all this? St. Paul anticipates passing some costs to state and federal partners, since the river is a regional and national resource. Urban designer Ken Greenberg of Toronto, who has helped plan the park, said that St. Paul may follow a "stewardship model" that would draw upon public and private resources to maintain and manage the riverfront. New York City's Central Park Conservancy and Boston's Rose Kennedy Greenway use such public-private partnerships.

With a projected 3,500 acres, the National Great River Park would be four times the size of Central Park — and different in other ways as well.

With a projected 3,500 acres, the National Great River Park would be four times the size of Central Park.

"It's very clear where the boundaries of Central Park are," said Patrick Seeb, executive director of the St. Paul Riverfront Corp. and a key advocate for the big park. "You know when you've entered Central Park and when you've left." On the other hand, the St. Paul plan in effect means "there is no boundary between the river and the city."

Seeb said he'll know the plan has worked if restaurants and neighborhoods bill themselves as "riverfront" even a mile back from the bank.

Early manifestations of St. Paul's

new riverfront mindset include trails and greenway along riverside Shepherd Road and a more river-friendly plan for a controversial floodwall protecting the city's airport.

A proposed megaproject will test the park backers' mettle. The Bridges, a \$1 billion, 32-acre riverfront entertainment and lifestyle center in downtown St. Paul, would include retail and office space, and 1,050 housing units. Many people think it's too big, but others like its potential for drawing shoppers into the central city. Local developer Jerry Trooien is scaling it back, but it will still be big. How parklike does St. Paul envision its riverfront? Stay tuned. ☞

Marc Hequet is a contributing editor to Big River . His last story was "Digging Ancient River History" in the July-August 2005 issue.

Brian Gardner is a photographer who lives in St. Paul.

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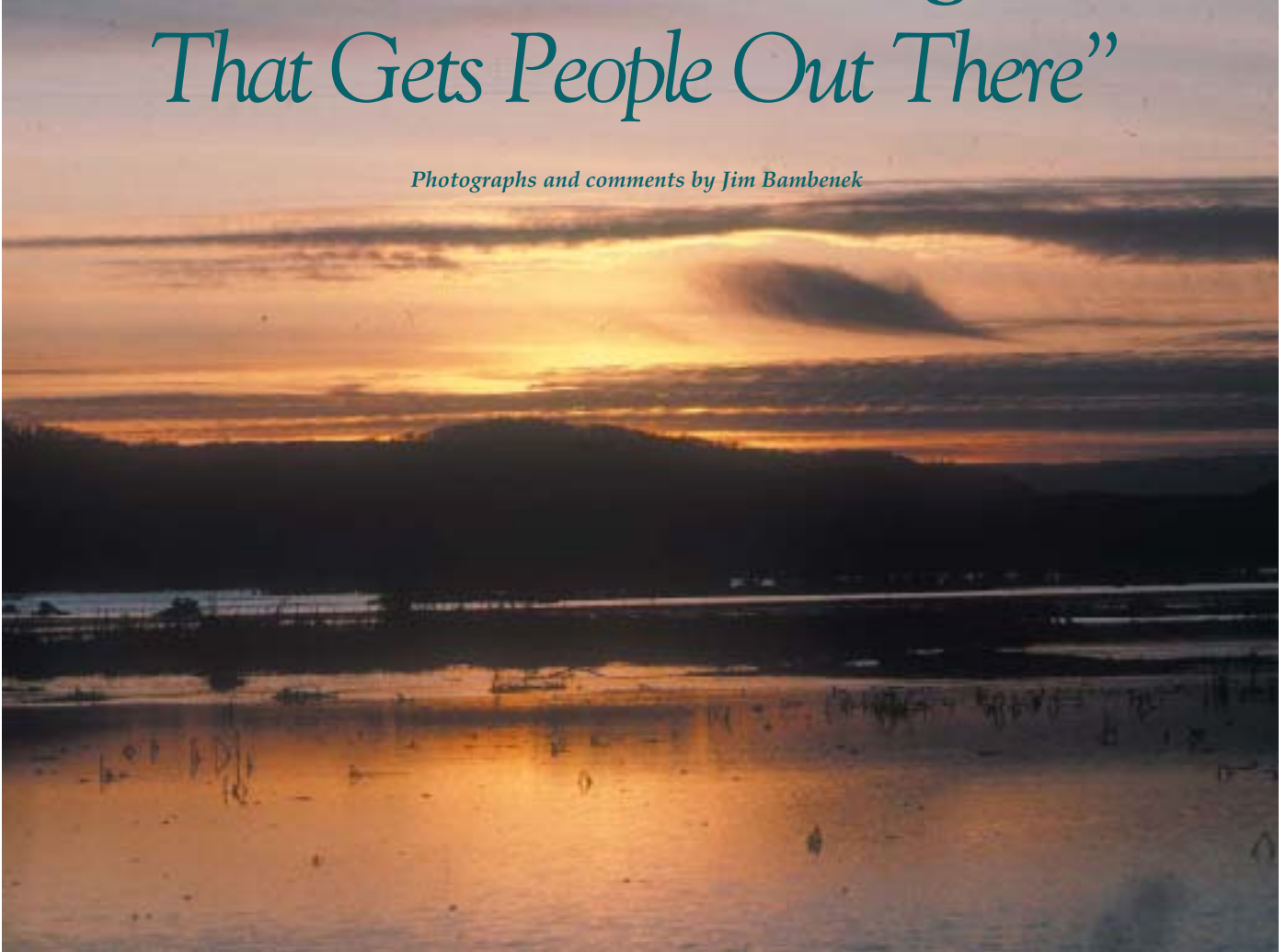


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*“It’s Not Duck-Killing,
It’s Duck Hunting
That Gets People Out There”*

Photographs and comments by Jim Bambenek



On opening day this year I went out at 5:00 a.m., like I used to, and I was in my boat already when it was still dark. You can hear the birds. Every bird out there makes a different sound. The bluebills and the mallards sound different from the wigeons and the canvasbacks. I was out there for that hour between dark and sunrise, hearing them, and then I watched the sun rise.

I have a saying that, ‘it’s not duck-killing, it’s duck-hunting that gets people out there.’ I didn’t shoot any ducks on opening day this year, and it didn’t matter.



I've been duck hunting since I was about 10 years old, and I've taught my kids to hunt. My daughter [pictured above] started when she was about 7 years old. She still likes to go out with me, but she's 30 years old and lives and works in Manhattan, so we don't get out often.

My favorite time to go duck hunting is late in the season, when there's ice and snow and the wind is blowing. The only ones out there then are crazy! I refuse to hunt in the rain, because all it is is wet, but snow? Wow! My dogs love it, too.





I'll say one thing — those [pool] drawdowns really work! I used to hunt at Weaver Bottoms in the 1950s and 60s, when it was in its prime. It went into a slide over the years, and I stopped going there. I called it a "water desert." But now after a couple years of the drawdown, it's full of vegetation again. The sandbars are choked with arrowhead, and the wild rice is back... That sure brings the birds.

I saw more birds this year than I have in 10 years!

Groups of 10-15 birds came in and settled. They stayed this year because there's food again. I saw Canada geese, sandhill cranes, white pelicans, mallards, wigeons, blue- and green-winged teal, shovelers, bluebills and canvasbacks. Pretty soon there will be tundra swans. You don't hunt those, but they're huge and beautiful, and fun to watch.

I think there's a green glimmer of hope out there.



Mallards are most popular, but to me, the best bird is the teal, roasted, with red wine sauce. Of course, there's nothing like a big goose done on the grill with hickory chips. They aren't hard to get anymore, now that the giants are coming over from Rochester. They are one of three subgroups of Canada geese that they thought was extinct until someone discovered them in Rochester.



Jim Bambenek is a photographer who lives in Winona, Minn.

Pamela Eyden, news and photo editor of Big River, interviewed him.

Catfish Planet

A New Exhibit Shows You Everything You Want to Know About This Ubiquitous, Humble, Lovable Fish

By Pete Beurskens

Ever noodle a catfish? Noodling is reaching underwater into a dark hole with your bare hands, hoping a big cat clamps on, and pulling the fish out manually if it does. If this sounds a bit risky, you can get a sense of the experience without losing any skin at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque, Iowa. An interactive display lets you do just that, albeit with a fiberglass catfish. The display is part of a fascinating and

well-designed exhibit called “Catfish Planet.”

Who knew there was so much to the lowly, ugly, and, I thought, generally unloved catfish? On my family’s recent visit to the museum and aquarium, “Catfish Planet” held our attention so long that our two hours were not enough to properly look over the rest of the building.

We learned that the largest cat is the Wels catfish, a European monster that can grow almost 17 feet long and weigh as much as 730 pounds.

There are 34 families of catfish — 3,000 described species, plus one or two thousand more that haven’t been described yet. Among the species, the exhibit shows, are the upside down cat, which swims that way to better catch insects that fall into the water. The names of many of the species are as interesting and unique as the fish themselves — the giant bumble bee cat, the red tailed cat and the Mekong shark cat, for example.

Besides filling 21 big aquariums with 100 varieties of catfish, the ex-



Visitors to the Catfish Planet exhibit can climb around inside a seven-foot-tall catfish with movable whiskers. (National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium)

hibit engages visitors with a full range of modern museum educational techniques — video displays, interactive hands-on displays, and attractive, colorful wall displays showing, for instance, raised silhouettes the actual sizes of catfish, from the tiny to the humongous. Video displays showed netting, box trapping and noodling catfish. One humorous video presents four men struggling with big cats to the song “Dance with Me,” while a somewhat frightening video shows a school of piranha-like cats devouring a much larger fish as

an apprehensive diver narrates.

The museum has assembled a variety of fascinating artifacts, including an actual trotline that spans nearly the length of the room with examples of baits attached. We also viewed a 50-million-year-old fossil and walked through a larger-than-life-size (over 7 feet tall) catfish sculpture in which you can see the fish’s anatomy, look through its eyes and play with its barbels (whiskers).

In some states, catfish (primarily the North American channel cat) is the number-one crop, and estimates

suggest the whiskery fish will soon surpass beef nationally as a meat source.

So get to Dubuque before the exhibit ends in spring 2007 and try your hand at noodling, or just have a great time learning everything there is to know about this lowly, but surprisingly lovable, fish. 🐟 📖

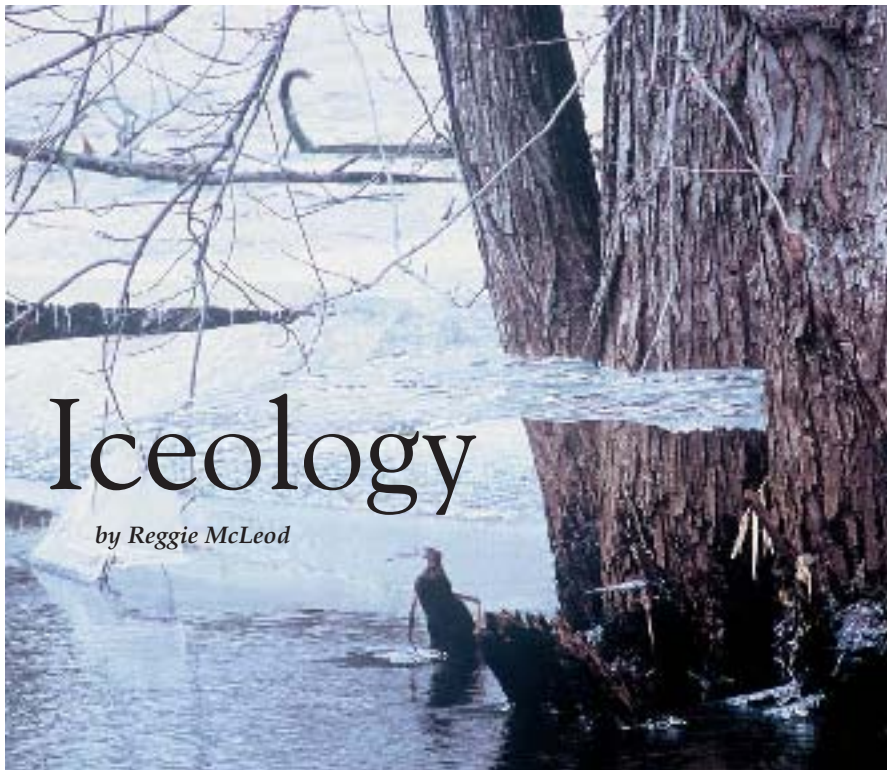
Pete Beurskens is a writer based in River Falls, Wis. His last story was a review of the Confluence restaurant, in the September-October issue.



Top and right: The Catfish Planet exhibit will be on display in Dubuque until spring 2007, then go on tour.

Above: There are 100 varieties of catfish in the aquariums, which are mounted low enough that children can easily see into them. (National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium)

KNOW YOUR RIVER



A fragile ice shelf hangs on to a tree, left high and dry by the falling water level. (Allen B. Sheldon)

We northerners largely take for granted the amazing transformation of the world in winter. Much of the transformation involves ice: the fragile ice crystals of snow or the brittle crystalline skin that grows on the tops of our lakes, rivers, roads, sidewalks and front steps.

We also take for granted the very unusual behavior of liquid water's transformation into ice. Almost every liquid chemical or metal contracts as it cools, getting denser. Water, however, gets denser until it reaches 39°F (4°C), then it begins expanding, getting less dense. When it freezes it expands by nine percent all at once, which is how it breaks pipes, rocks and bottles. This is also why ice floats in water. If water behaved like most other liquids, ice would form at the bottom of lakes and rivers and thicken toward the surface. Just imagine what the great white north would be like if water behaved "normally."

Through the Ice

Nobody has a closer relationship with ice than a trapper.

"Ice is the biggest hazard that one

faces in the backwaters, especially if you get a little snow with the first ice," warned Kenny Salwey, who trapped for several decades in the backwaters near Buffalo City, Wis. He also co-authored *The Last River Rat* with J. Scott Bestul and wrote *Tales of the Last River Rat*.

Salwey admits that he would have to take off both boots and count on his fin-

You should always assume that the ice is not safe.

gers and toes to tally up the times he has fallen through the ice.

In the spring the ice develops a honeycomb structure and loses its strength.

"In the spring it's the most dangerous. You can fall through a foot of ice. I've done that a lot of times," he recalled.

Salwey used to carry a small hand axe in his overalls. When he went through the ice, he would reach as far as possible and drive the axe into the ice and pull himself out. Even if you're

lucky enough to pull yourself out, hypothermia could stop you cold. Once, in sub-zero weather after breaking through the ice he was trying to hurry back to his shack, but his pant legs kept freezing up "just like stovepipes." To get moving again he'd give each leg a careful tap with the hand axe, behind the knee, and quickly take another 40 or 50 steps before they froze up again.

He carried matches, a candle and cedar shavings in a



Wind and waves create icy patterns on the frozen surface of the river. (Bill Charlesworth)

waterproof container, for emergencies. It can be more difficult than you might imagine to light a match when hypothermia is closing in. If you have an emergency kit, he advises testing it out on a sub-zero day with a good wind, so you'll be prepared if a real emergency arises.

You should always assume that the ice is not safe, Salwey warned.

Behavior of Ice

The best ice forms during calm, cold nights in a period without snow. This ice is so clear that you can spot fish frozen into it. When the sun hits it at the right angle, it turns the light into tiny rainbows. If you're an ice skater, getting out on this sort of ice before the first snowfall is a real treat. It is often referred to as "black ice" or "blue ice."

When snow falls on ice, it insulates the ice from the cold air and conceals thin spots. As the snow thaws and refreezes it forms "white ice," which contains tiny air bubbles and isn't as strong as clear ice.

"Honeycomb ice" or "rotten ice" is like slush. Unless you can walk on water, you should stay off this ice.

Changing water levels, winds, currents, thaws and freezes create a variety of ice structures and textures. Ice sheets ram together and refreeze into tiny mountain ranges. The river level drops, leaving fragments of ice sheets tipping from the shoreline or in midair, frozen to trees.

Ice on the river seems to take one big breath each day — expanding in the morning when the sun warms it and contracting at night when it cools. The uneven expansion and contraction sends cracks racing through it. On a clear day, stand out on river ice during sunrise or just after sunset to hear the cracks sizzle through the ice — sounding like gunshots when they pass by.

Ice is particularly dangerous on a river, where upwelling currents weaken patches of ice, falling water levels can leave hollow spots under ice, and currents can pull you under the ice if you fall in. For these reasons, it's probably never safe to cross the ice on the Main Channel. If trappers and others familiar with local conditions can fall through the ice in backwaters, anyone can fall through the ice. If you're going to travel on ice, review the safety rules and carry a set of "ice claws" that can be used to pull yourself out of the water.

Working with the Ice

When we think of ice, we think of danger or recreation — breaking through the ice, slipping on the ice, ice skating and ice fishing — but up until the 1930s it was an important commodity. Men and horses headed out on lakes and rivers in the winter to cut it into blocks and store it in ice houses. Trains loaded with Mississippi River ice headed to the big packing houses and cities.

The hardy few who live in boathouses year-round love it and hate it. When the ice thickens up, they can drive to their houses with food, water, fuel oil and other essentials. However, in the spring, the river level sometimes rises before the ice breaks up, which will quickly put a boathouse



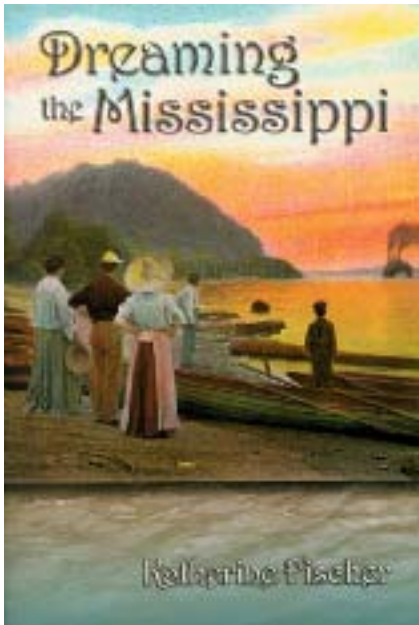
A jagged ridge of ice juts out of the river's surface. (Bill Charlesworth)

floor under water, unless the intrepid boathouser quickly cuts the house free of the surrounding ice — a cold, wet, dangerous task.

Eagle watches depend on iced-up backwaters for their success. If the backwaters are open, eagles spread out to look for food. When the backwaters and most of the Main Channel are locked in ice, eagles congregate around open water, especially the downstream sides of dams, sometimes more than a hundred in one place. They are feeding mostly on gizzard shad, which die when the water gets too cold.

Usually the last stretch of the Main Channel blocked by ice is the lower end of Lake Pepin, where the Army Corps of Engineers begins measuring the ice in mid February until it gets too thin. The shipping season officially opens on the Upper Mississippi when the first towboat makes it through Lake Pepin and reaches St. Paul, around the end of March. On the upper river, this is akin to the swallows returning to Capistrano. Can the sultry days of summer be far behind? 🌊 🦉

Reggie McLeod is editor of Big River Magazine.



THE MISSISSIPPI AS SUBJECT, SETTING AND INSPIRATION

Reviews by Pete Beurskens, Pamela Eyden, Reggie McLeod and Molly McGuire

Buried Indians: Digging Up the Past in a Midwestern Town

Laurie Hovell McMillin, *University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wis., 2006, 283 pages, \$24.95, paperback.*

On a low outcropping of the bluffs towering over Trempealeau, Wis., lie three ancient mounds shaped like flattened pyramids and connected by short earthen ramps. In the 1990s, archaeologists from the Mississippi River Archaeology Center in nearby La Crosse, Wis., tried to help the river town restore the mounds and display them to the public. Initially, the project received public support, but soon the tides turned and the project was dropped.

McMillin, who grew up in the community and still has many relatives there, was intrigued by the story and what it revealed about the connections between the current and ancient locals. Her book mingles the history of her family with the history of the area. She writes about the Hopewell, Woodland and Mississippian mounds that still punctuate the landscape; the early white settlers; current residents of Indian ancestry; archaeological investigations; and pivotal events in her life and her family's history, weaving it all together into a complex pattern of history and attitudes.

"... It seems to me, then, that part of what I'm doing in this project is collecting these accounts, hearing them, and bringing them together to make a different kind of sense by including other stories, by setting these seemingly unrelated tales next to

each other. They may not flow into one seamless narrative; they link up for a different kind of history, a story that suggests the layers and webs that connect people across time, that connect people to a place."

McMillin moved away to go to college and is now an associate professor of rhetoric, composition and religion at Oberlin College, so she views the community both as a credentialled local and an academic outsider. She skillfully blends both voices, revealing the insights and blind spots of both perspectives.

This is an ambitious, complex and layered book. (RM)

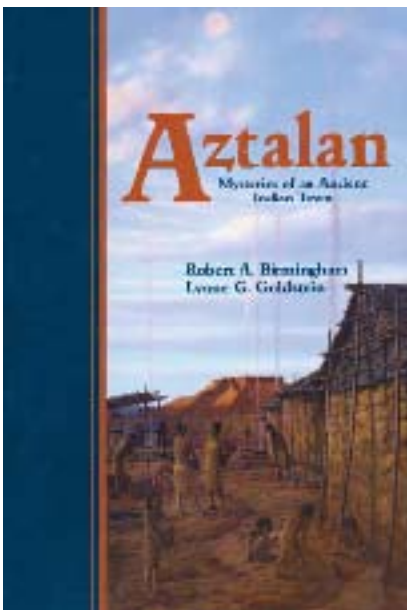
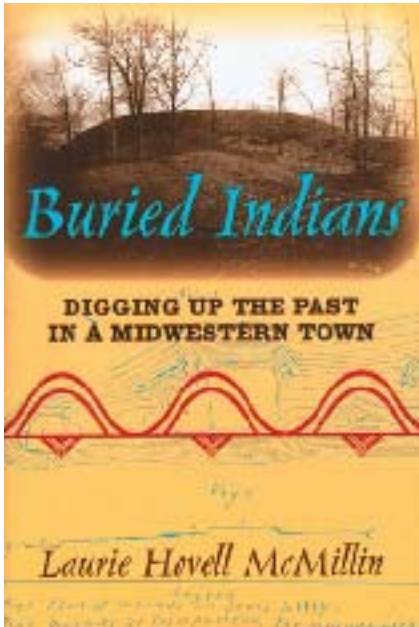


Aztalan, Mysteries of an Ancient Indian Town

Robert A. Birmingham and Lynne G. Goldstein, *Wisconsin Historical Society Press, Madison, Wis., 2005, 138 pages, \$14.95, paperback.*

Nine hundred years ago, a new type of town sprouted in what is now southern Wisconsin. It was surrounded by a high white wall. Inside those walls, three large, flat-topped pyramid mounds marked the boundaries of a plaza where residents probably attended ceremonies and games. Beyond the walls they tended large fields of corn.

This place was probably an outpost of the Mississippian culture, which was based in Cahokia, across the Mississippi from where St. Louis is today. Mississippians lived in Aztalan from about 1100 to 1250. In the early 1800s the site on the Crawfish



River was named Aztalan, because many people assumed that it was built by Aztecs. Other smaller Mississippian sites have been studied in Trempealeau, Wis., and Red Wing, Minn.

Birmingham, a professor at U.W.-Waukesha, and formerly the state archeologist; and Goldstein, a professor at Michigan State University, who has studied Aztalan for nearly 30 years, lay out the history of the study of the site and what is known about it in a clear methodical way. The book should be an easy and interesting read for anybody interested in the subject. A wealth of drawings, photos and maps round out the information. (RM)



Treasures of the Mississippi — Panoramas & Poetic Reflections

Abdul Karim Sinno, Ph.D., and Rafic Sinno, MBA; Shepherd, Inc., Dubuque, Iowa, 2006, 104 pages, \$34.95, hardcover.

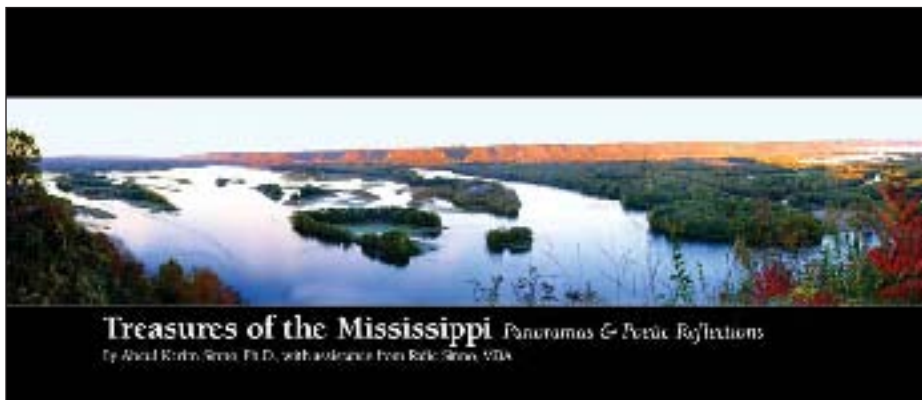
This book of Mississippi River photographs stands out from others, first of all because of its format — 14 inches wide and 6 inches tall, with panoramic photos stretching across both facing pages. Second, because of its enthusiastic and sometimes rapturous text that makes the reader look again to see what the author-photographer sees.

Abdul Karim Sinno immigrated several decades ago from Lebanon. He is currently head of the communication department at Clarke College in Dubuque, and he has a passion for the Mississippi River, a passion he shares with his family.

"I come from Lebanon in the Middle-East! Yes, the beautiful land that is burning. I come with a mission of beauty and peace. I have a mission and a hope that people can unite and enjoy instead of fight and destroy. People can dispute politics, but never dispute beauty," he says in his introduction.

"Just look and heal. God has given the Midwest an example of heaven!" he says about one scene.

The photographs portray locations



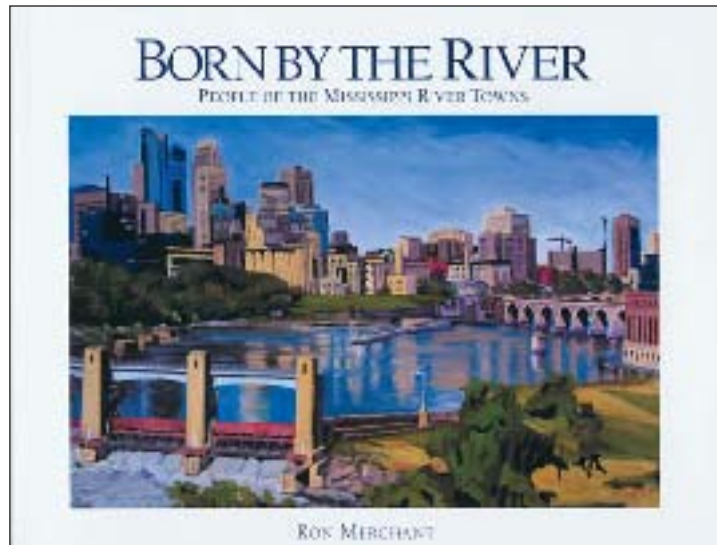
in five states, from St. Paul to St. Louis, each accompanied by a short comment. The images contain a lot — waterfront, river towns, bluffs, islands, locks and dams. Some of the photographs are vividly and eerily lit, as when the river is in deep shadow and the evening sun is still on the bluffs, or when the camera shutter stays open long enough to capture a silent river and an empty urban waterfront on a dark night. Some are stunningly beautiful. All are interesting for their richness of color and detail. (PE)



Dreaming the Mississippi

Katherine Fischer, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Mo., 2006, 216 pages, \$18.95, paperback.

Dreaming the Mississippi comprises 16 essays dealing with various ways the river intersects with the author's life across 25-plus years living along the river. Fisher spent a childhood near Lake Michigan and moved to Dubuque after high school to attend Clarke College, where she is an associate professor of English today, but her first attraction to the river was from a distance and through literature. As a child, she played Huck



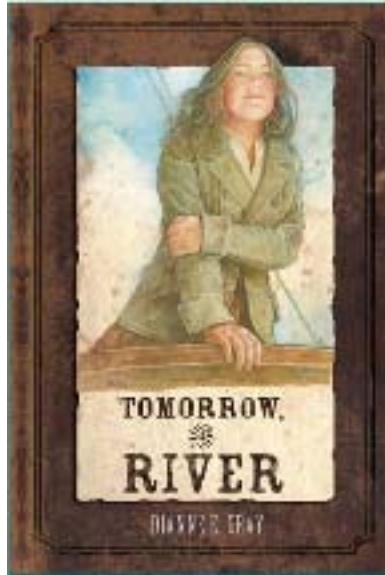
Finn, inspired by her teacher Sister John-Mary's animated reading of Twain's book: "At home after school, I fished the storm ditches for catfish and pretended to smoke reeds behind the garage while balancing on a plywood raft 'afloat' on rain water." The river seems to have flowed into her imagination and eventually steered her to the banks of the real thing.

The book is not a memoir, but a collection of personal essays, beginning, logically enough, with "Itasca" and ending with "The Gulf," though the book doesn't move downriver, but moves more or less randomly from one topic to another. The essays fall into a few themes or topics. Some are technical or how-to pieces ("Locking Through," "Wing Dams"). Others describe river living ("Fever," "Gloria in Excelsis Polka") or river events ("Gulf," "Sho-Gunning the Mississippi," "River Rising").

The author mentions Terry Tempest-Williams, the Utah naturalist and writer, and her book reminds me of

Tempest-Williams' writing. Fischer weaves elements of her life and the life of her family with encounters with the river, and the book is in some ways as much about their lives as about the river, with the river often acting as a metaphor or catalyst for her thinking about the people and events and ideas she encounters.

Most river lovers will find many chapters in this book to enjoy. Though Fischer has strong views on such issues as channelization and other environmental issues, hunting, jet skis and too-fast boats, she recognizes and respects other points of view. For readers who know the river well, some chapters, primarily the technical ones, will not offer much new information. After all, the book chronicles the author's coming to know and love the river. But those same readers will likely enjoy other chapters in which Fischer ruminates on the intense longing for spring that houseboaters experience, on the joys and frustrations of shopping for and then maintaining a riverfront place,



and on her visit to post-Katrina New Orleans. Finally, Fischer's regard for the river is so deep and enthusiastic that reading the book has the power to renew one's own interest in the "river of today — its people and its energy as a life force within America, beyond stereotype and myth." (PB)



Tomorrow, the River

Dianne E. Gray, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2006, 233 pages, \$16.00, paperback.

This historical novel for young adults (ages 10 to 14) follows a 15-year-old girl as she travels by train from her Nebraska homestead to join her married sister on a small paddle-wheel boat on the Upper Mississippi in 1896. Together they journey upriver from Burlington, Iowa, to Prairie du Chien, Wis.

On the way, our heroine learns to swim, chop wood on islands and pilot the boat. She discovers a talent for taking photographs, and she bucks convention by taking a job cleaning mussels for the button industry. The story gets off to a great start, the plot is engaging and the characters well-sketched.

Winona writer Gray has given kids a fine way to learn about the river,

(Book reviews continue on page 41)

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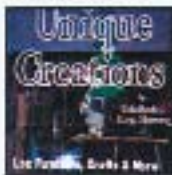
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(Book reviews continued from page 36)

riverboats and rivertown history. Her book gave me river dreams. I could almost feel the rocking of the boat and hear the steady “chuff-chuff-chuff” of the paddles hitting the water. (PE)



Born by the River — People of the Mississippi River Towns

Ron Merchant, *Limner Fine Publishing, Minneapolis, Minn., 2006, 142 pages, \$40.00, hardcover.*

This book is the result of painter Ron Merchant's project to paint, photograph and interview residents of selected river towns in Minnesota, with an eye to showing how people are connected to the river and how this connection shapes their lives and attitudes.

In one year he created more than 100 paintings and photographs, which were then mounted as a traveling exhibit on tour throughout the region this year. The final showing, at Paramount Theater and Visual Art Center in St. Cloud, Minn., will close December 30, 2006.

This book, a companion to the exhibit, contains 36 paintings, 60 photographs and 26 interviews., as well as two critical essays. The paintings are engaging in both style and content. They picture people doing what people do in river towns — hang out, go fishing, survey wares in an outdoor market, sip coffee at an outdoor cafe, ride bikes and get pulled over by police. The photographs document the places where he painted, and the interviews add depth to his experience, and ours, of these places.

Merchant is an artist and owner of the Robbin Gallery in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. (PE)



Horns and Wrinkles

Joseph Helgerson, *Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 2006, 357 pages, \$16.00, hardcover.*

El-tongue. Mossbottom. Fishfly. Leechlicker. Gartooth. These are

(Book reviews continue on page 44)

Guides Reference

Raptors in your pocket — A Guide to Great Plains Birds of Prey

Dana Gardner, *University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 2006, \$9.95.*

This is a very handy and useful laminated 14-panel pocket guide showing 26 species of raptors in various positions and plumage variations. Minimal text specifies residents and visitors, and average size. Great gift. Great to have in your car. (PE)

Amphibians & Reptiles of the North Woods

Allen Blake Sheldon, *Kollath+Stensaas Publishing, Duluth, Minn., 2006, 148 pages, \$18.95, paperback.*

Allen Sheldon's wildlife photographs frequently appear in the pages of *Big River*. This new guide features a lot of amphibians and reptiles common to the river, as well as Up North. Small maps identify where species are found. The photographs are plentiful and, as expected, fascinating in clarity and detail. (PE)

The Shorebird Guide

O'Brien, Crossley, Karlson; *Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2006, 476 pages, \$24.95, hardcover.*

Some shorebirds nest in the Upper Mississippi; others arrive in swirling masses to feed on river mudflats during their seasonal migrations. This sturdy guide will make it easier to identify these beautiful birds, by helping you learn their relative size, structure, behavior and voice. It includes excellent photographs of common and rare domestic birds, and important details about migration, behavior and appearance. (PE)

Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America

Eaton and Kaufman, *Houghton Mifflin Company, NY, 2006, 392 pages, to be determined.*

A masterpiece of conciseness, this is an overview of insects found from northern Mexico to northern Canada. A pictorial table of contents helps you identify unfamiliar insects — not surprising, since there are 90,000 of them — and directs you to follow color tabs or page numbers to look for the best

match. The book includes a whopping 350 images and is a satisfying book to own, if you like to look at bugs. Included are enough facts to pique the curiosity. For example, did you know that water striders' legs are covered in fine hairs that don't get saturated, allowing them to skate on top of the water without breaking surface tension? (PE)

Nautical Rules of the Road

B. A. Farnsworth, Larry C. Young, and Steven D. Browne, *Cornell Maritime Press, Centreville, Md., 2006, 207 pages, \$40.00, hardcover.*

Dictionary of Maritime and Transportation Terms

Jeffrey W. Monroe and Robert J. Stewart, *Cornell Maritime Press, Centreville, Md., 2006, 421 pages, \$19.95, paperback.*

Two new reference books will make nice additions to serious boaters' libraries. The dictionary (with no illustrations) is nearly as long as some regular dictionaries. In it, one can find entries for the most common boating and transportation terms, as well as the lesser known, such as:

“Electrical Derangement — Mechanical and/or electrical derangement is an insurance industry term to describe malfunction, or nonfunction, of an appliance for reasons other than obvious external damage. From time to time, an electronic or mechanically operated item will prove to be inoperable upon arriving at its destination. See Mechanical Derangement Exclusion.”

What boater has not experienced an odd mysterious “nonfunction” of a boat?

Nautical Rules of the Road is also a useful, if quite technical, book. It has in it all you ever wanted to know about navigation rules, international and inland. Because I am a low-tech kind of boater (kayak and canoe) I showed the text to a Lake Michigan sailor and Mississippi River motor boater, and he declared it fascinating and well designed. The illustrations, some in color, are quite clear and instructive. In case you want to test yourself, Appendix A of the book contains 140 multiple choice rules-of-the-road questions. Enjoy! (PB)





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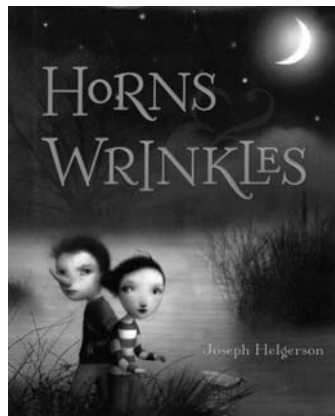
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some of the whimsical names of the river trolls in the "rivery" book, *Horns and Wrinkles*, a middle-grades fantasy book set in fictional Blue Wing, Minn., a town based on Winona. I borrow the wonderful word "rivery" from Helgerson, whose characters use the term to refer to odd and mystical goings-on along the Mississippi. The book is more in the tradition of *Harry Potter* than *The Lord of the Rings* or the *Narnia* series, as it takes place in a realistic contemporary setting where fantastic things can happen, and it is the setting and the descriptions of the river that may pull adults readers into this world.

The narrator, a middle school-aged girl named Claire, finds that her bully cousin Duke's nose has grown. This is not just a Pinocchio nose, simply a longer one than the original. This is a rhino horn. Each time Duke does something nasty, the horn grows — painfully, judging by Duke's reaction. This is one of the charms of the book.



Who wouldn't like to see this happen to the real life bullies of one's experience? But Claire, a kind-hearted soul, sets about trying to help Duke, which leads her into trouble as she finds that Duke has taken up with a gang of unpleasant and mischievous but not entirely evil river trolls, and that the trolls will demand Claire's involvement in their own adventures. Along the way, some of Claire's family is turned to stone. But, never fear, the Blue Winged Fairy is always near-

by to lend Claire a magical hand.

The author has a nice way of evoking the river. We hear ominous sounds of tow boats at night, smell rushing spring flood water, and see muskrats speeding through the water. Delight in and a realistic awe of the river pervade the book.

The author, now of Minneapolis, grew up around Winona, and spent many a night sandbar camping on the river with his family. His intimacy with the river is apparent. He has taken the overwhelming, fearful, but also attractive nature of the river felt by children, and expressed it through fantasy, so that although the book does not have the gravity of *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Hobbit*, it does have a gently haunting and yet somehow upbeat feel, an effect that is enhanced by the charming and whimsical illustrations of Nicoletta Ceccoli.

The book seemed a little long. Considering its episodic structure, it could easily have been condensed. (PB)

(Book reviews continue on page 49)

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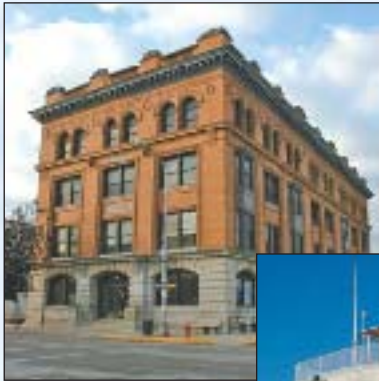
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The Driftless Area

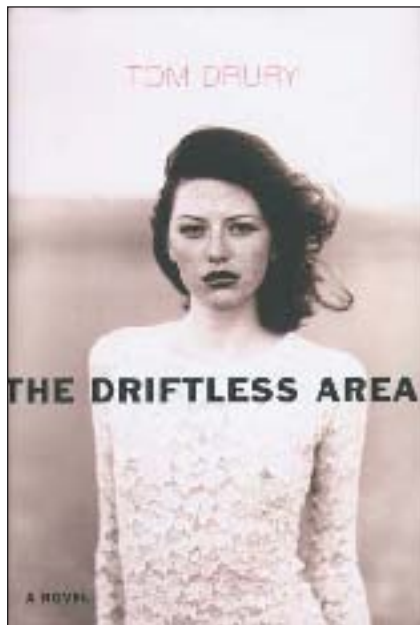
Tom Drury, *Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, 2006, 213 pages, \$22.00, hardcover.*

This book is part mystery, part romance and partly a novel about revenge. Most of its characters live in small towns of the Driftless Area, a unique geological region extending from southern Minnesota to northern Illinois, which was missed by the last glacier and so is noted for its steep river bluffs, rolling hills, hidden streams and secret valleys. The bad guys in the book inhabit a rougher town near a river that most readers will recognize as the Mississippi. As one of these miscreants drives through the valley towns on his way to the river, he sees them as “lonely little places hunkered in with streetlamps marking the passage of the nothing night.”

Main character Pierre Hunter grew up in the region. He’s 24, a college graduate and a bartender in an out-of-the-way supper club that has never lived up to its owner’s dreams. Pierre has known his friends since high school, including a woman who persists in writing really terrible poetry (which Drury delights us with samples of). He is a likable enough character, but reticent to jump into life. Then he meets a mysterious woman, someone different from the rest of the townspeople — just how different we are about to discover.

In reading this book, I was at impatient at first for something to really happen, despite Pierre’s new romance. There was enough foreshadowing to know that something greater was going to happen, and hints that more had already happened. And happen it did, the moment Pierre did something unusual, which means deliberately doing something. As the plot becomes a little dangerous and spooky, Drury leads us into questions about life and the meaning of life, death and the afterlife.

References to the way time moves are scattered throughout:



“A train of five lime-green barges was going through the lock on the river, a deliberate process yet impressive in the way of all things that move slowly but with great mass.”

Most of the characters are convincingly midwestern. If you listen closely, you can hear some of the characters playing roles in this “*Fargo*” of the Driftless Region.

“Oh, my husband. He drives the wrecker in town and he’s supposed to pick up any cars and tow them in should they be wrecked or abandoned. So anyway I thought I better see what the deal was because I didn’t want him making the trip for nothing.”

I enjoyed this book. Drury’s writing is spare with no frills. He uses apt descriptive phrases without saying too much, so readers use their own imagination. All the details and coincidences mean something, and the meanings are brought out in due time. (MM)



The Mississippi River in 1953: A Photographic Journey from the Headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico

Charles Dee Sharp, *Center for American Places (distributed by U. of Chicago Press), Santa Fe, N.M., and Staunton, Va., 2005, 222 pages, \$49.95 hardcover; \$29.95, paperback.*

The Mississippi River in 1953 is a coffee table-sized book that is really two books in one — Charles Dee Sharp’s amazing photographs of a trip downriver on a towboat, and his accompanying notes. Sharp captured the river at a point in American history when the last real working paddle-wheelers still plied the river, and the country as a whole was about to change.

Sharp’s photographs show the river in all its beauty and charm, but they also chronicle vast chemical plants on the lower river’s “cancer alley;” signs that announce “Caution Open Sewer,” and “Mississippi Delta Diner — Whites Only — Coloreds Use Back Door;” and dilapidated river towns.

Sharp’s writing rises at times to poetry: “On the short wave we listened to the conversations of pilots communicating with other pilots... ‘His boat was smokin’ so much I thought the fog was rollin’ in.’ ‘Aw, we’re just tip-toin’ along down here, watchin’ the moon cloudin’ over.’”

The colorful people encountered along the way and the lively observations of Sharp’s captain-host make the book entertaining and humane. Here is Captain Ware on the difference between the upper and lower river: “This northern river’s alluring. And there’s people... Down on the lower river you don’t see nobody. You go for fifty, hundred-mile stretches, a day and a half sometimes, you won’t see nobody. That river’s wide down there — vast, desolate. It stretches beyond the grasp of your imagination. If you got any craziness in you, it’ll bring it out. You got to know who you are down there.”

Concluding essays by Mississippi National River and Recreation Area historian John O. Anfinson discuss the literary, historical, and geological river and add to the reader’s understanding of the photos.

Sharp’s book deserves to be read by anyone who wants to experience this great changing river at a dynamic moment in American history. (PB) 📖

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MIDWEST MOUNTAINEERING

(Robert J. Hurt continued from page 52)

University of Chicago, to Champaign-Urbana to finish his architectural training, to Vietnam, then Aspen, Colo., La Crosse, Wis., and finally to the river town of Dakota, Minn., where he has converted a house into studio and office space.

Hurt first took photography seriously on his tour of duty in Vietnam. He was assigned to the First Air Cavalry, which went up every day in little bubble helicopters to gather intel-

Shooting from the air allows him to present a holistic view of the river and its ecosystems, and give people a fresh view of familiar landscapes.

ligence. These Vietnam photographs were part of a slideshow he created with two Army friends a few years later. Set to a musical soundtrack of The Moody Blues' *To our Children's Children's Children*, "It was very emotional — it showed the Vietnamese people, the destruction, but no dead bodies," Hurt said. He and his friends presented the show quite a few times. In one big show, "we were kind of the warm-up act for a concert — the early Nitty Gritty Dirt Band," Hurt said, laughing.

While working as an architect in Aspen, and later in La Crosse, Hurt's interests turned to historical preservation and restoration projects. Eventually, though, his frustration with urban sprawl and "the degradation of the built environment" led him to shift from architecture to photography.

Through a grant-funded project to look at sprawl and alternatives, Hurt started doing aerial photography. This led to a lot of organizations, primarily those working on conservation issues, asking to hire him around 1995.

His first professional photo assignment involved an all-day shoot visually chronicling the Mississippi River bluffs in northeast Iowa for the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Besides capturing all of the bluffs from vari-

ous angles, Hurt also photographed sites that people had donated or on which they had allowed conservation easements. He was also to "photograph anything beautiful — that is, anything I found beautiful. It was a dream assignment," he said.

Hurt has completed scores of assignments on the river and has created a three-fold niche, using aerial photography to serve his clients, to serve the cause of conservation and to create fine art.

About 115 of his large-scale fine art photographic prints were purchased by the Mayo Clinic. His work has appeared several times on the cover of and inside *Big River* magazine, and a similar aerial shot of the river at La Crosse was used on the covers of both Cal Fremling's book *Immortal River* and *The Little Tow-Watcher's Guide*. Some day, he would love to do a whole book of his photographs.

Shooting from the air allows him to present a holistic view of the river and its ecosystems, and give people a fresh view of familiar landscapes.

For example, not long ago, a friend who works for the U.S. Geological Service came looking for a photo for a retirement gift. Hurt showed him one of a place on the river where he had spent a lot of time working. "He said, 'Oh my God. We've worked right there and we had no idea [of the beauty of the place].'"

Hurt is concerned about the long-term health of the environment. "The turning back of a lot of environmental regulations recently is pretty discouraging," he said. He hopes his photography might make people more sensitive to the natural world.

Hurt feels an intimacy with the Mississippi.

"Cumulus clouds I know very well — cumulus clouds are my friends," he said. He was speaking about their effect on the pictures he takes, but one senses that he sees the river as a friend too, and his work is a testament to this friendship. ☘



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Robert J. Hurt shooting the river

By Pete Beurskens

A lot of good photographers go to great lengths to take photos of the Upper Mississippi River. Robert J. Hurt also goes to great heights — several hundred feet, to be precise. Hurt is an aerial photographer. He takes pictures from the passenger seat of a small airplane cruising over the river and bluffs-lands.

Many of his photographs are vivid panoramic views of the bluffs and the river. If you visit the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge visitors' centers, or page through publications from the Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Geological Service, Nature Conservancy, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and other river-related organizations, not to mention *Big River*, you've seen his work.

Hurt has lived in and photographed many beautiful places in North America and Europe, but he prefers the complexity of the bluffs and river.

"Around the Mississippi bluffs-lands, you have all these intimate valleys to explore," said Hurt. "You take these little winding roads and the scenery is always changing. I have a little 250 motorcycle and I just love to ride on the back roads. I just go slow, just a little faster than a bicycle, and explore the surroundings," he said.

Hurt said he is interested in sequences of space, "how things open up — you come around a corner and there's something new and different."

The tools of his trade go beyond those of the typical photographer. He has three computers in his studio, with which he works his photograph-

ic magic. Out in the field, his preferred plane is the Cessna 142, which can fly slow — 75 mph — and has high wings that don't get in the way.

The plane is not his only special tool in the air. "I use a gyro stabilizer. It goes onto the bottom of the camera. It has two gyros in it, and they spin at about 22,000 rpm. It is like having a tripod on the plane, and it prevents any unwanted movement. You can still move the camera, but it is like moving it through butter. It enables you to shoot at a slower speed and eliminate jostling, and you can take sharper photographs," Hurt explained.

He uses the digital equivalent of Fuji Velvia film, which allows a greater range of blue and greens.

"Living along the Mississippi River you become extremely aware of the water color. It can be anywhere from tremendously blue to tremendously grayish, reddish, yuck brown. And it has to do, one, with runoff, two, with the sky — how blue, how clear the atmosphere is — and, three, the angle you are shooting to the sun," he said.

Hurt's winding road to river photography began in the Czech Chicago suburb of Berwyn, Ill., and led to the

(Robert J. Hurt continues on page 51)



Downriver from La Crosse, Wis., Pool 8 forms a maze of backwaters. Clockwise starting from the top, you can barely see L&D 8 at Genoa, Wis., in the distance; Brownsville, Minn., on the Main Channel; Goose Island campground on the near left; Stoddard, Wis., and Hwy 35 on the upper left. (Photos by Robert J. Hurt)

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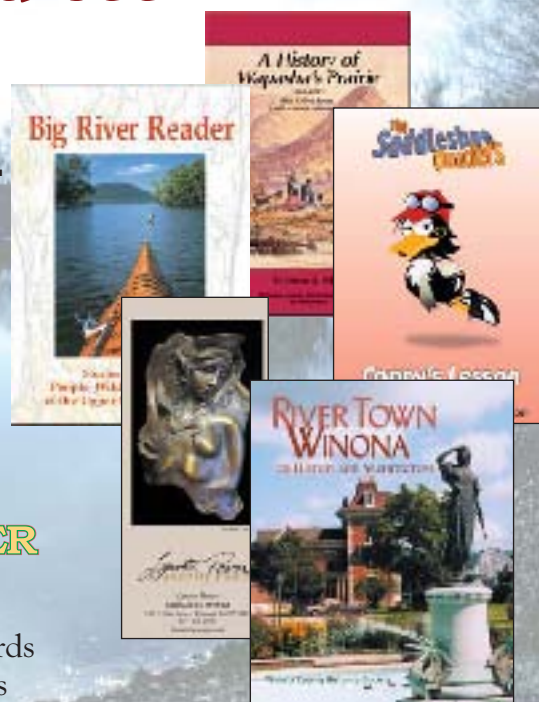
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