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Left: The Current Designs Carbon is quick, nimble Greenland-style touring kayak. © Mike Tetzl

Right: The We-no-nah Europa is performance canoe with exceptional glide. © John Marshall

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March-April 2007

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(Curtiss Preuss)

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(Robert Boszhardt)

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From the Riverbank

Reggie McLeod
Editor/Publisher

NATURE ON THE MOVE

If Osage oranges grew in southern Michigan, I'd probably be behind bars today, a convicted murderer. I spent much of my youth there dodging and throwing dirt clods, over-ripe pears, apples and crab apples.

Last October on a long midweek hike in Wildcat Den State Park, near Muscatine, Iowa, I found a peaceful clearing edged with Osage orange trees. An Osage orange is the size of a big orange, much heavier and covered with bumps. I threw a couple, careful not to dislocate my shoulder, and imagined what it would feel like to be smacked in the head with one. A concussion, if you're lucky.

The Osage orange is a small tree, native to the Midwest and not related to oranges. The yellow-green fruit is generally not eaten. You won't find Osage oranges until you get into the southern end of what we consider Big River Magazine's territory — Twin Cities to Quad Cities.

In the southern half of that range you'll find Kentucky coffee trees, a native locust tree that produces seeds that desperate white settlers used to brew a coffee substitute. When I drive from Minnesota to Iowa, I suddenly see lots of Kentucky coffee trees, but I have never

seen a Kentucky coffee tree with its roots in Minnesota soil.

The Osage oranges and Kentucky coffee trees are moving north, along with a procession of hundreds of other plants and animals, because of global warming. Last year was the warmest year on record for the United States. I don't expect that record to stand for very long.

Biologists have learned that to ensure the survival of a species, you must ensure the survival of its habitat — the plants and animals that

*Opossums used to literally
freeze their tails off when they
wandered up to Minnesota.*

it depends on. Intact habitats will not be able to move north, because species will move north at different speeds and displace existing plants and animals with varying success. This will likely take a toll on the productivity of many habitats and the survival of many species.

Trees will move north pretty slowly, but birds don't have roots. I saw flocks of blackbirds here in Winona in December and January this winter for the first time. In the warm months I used to have to travel south to see squadrons of vultures carefully examining the

(Riverbank continues on page 26)

Big River™

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River News

Mellow Mussels

Charleston, S.C. — New research shows that antidepressant chemicals in river water may harm wild mussels. When exposed to extra serotonin, the brain chemical that is boosted by antidepressant drugs, pregnant zebra mussels release larvae that are not viable.

Noting this, researchers at North Carolina University and the National Institute of Standards and Technology tested a native mussel, *Elliptio complanata*, which is common on the Eastern seaboard, in water that contained 300 micrograms per liter — higher concentrations than are found in the wild — of fluoxetine, the active ingredient in Prozac. Relatively few young survived. However, adult females raised in concentrations closer to those found in U.S. waters produced mostly viable young.

Sewage treatment plants do not remove all the fluoxetine from wastewater. (Science News 12-2-06)

Watching Eagles

Alma & La Crosse, Wis. — The turbulent waters below Lock and Dam 4 at Alma draw great numbers of hungry bald eagles — hundreds of them. Even in a harsh winter, 80 or more eagles hunt for fish and roost in trees nearby. The Wings Over Alma Nature and Art Center opened this winter at 118 Main St. to give visitors a better view of all this activity. The center displays local artists' works and provides an observation deck, complete with scopes and binoculars. It is also home to a visitor information center and gift shop.

Downriver, the confluence of the Black and Mississippi Rivers also attracts both bald eagles and eagle watchers. Drivers who cross the rivers on Interstate 90 often slow down for eagle aerial displays, high-speed dives and fights on the ice.

Now the La Crosse Planning Department is seeking grants and ap-

provals to turn the Highway 53 exit into a "vision corridor," complete with a parking pullout, a trail along the river and restaurants where visitors can dine when they tire of watching eagles eat.

Flood of Riverboat Photos

Winona, Minn. — Collector Ralph DuPae of La Crosse has donated copies of 59,000 historical photographs to the Winona County Historical Society. The images, most of which were taken on the Mississippi River in the 19th and early 20th centuries, include riverboats and river scenes; captains and crew; the construction of wingdams, locks and dams; and town views.

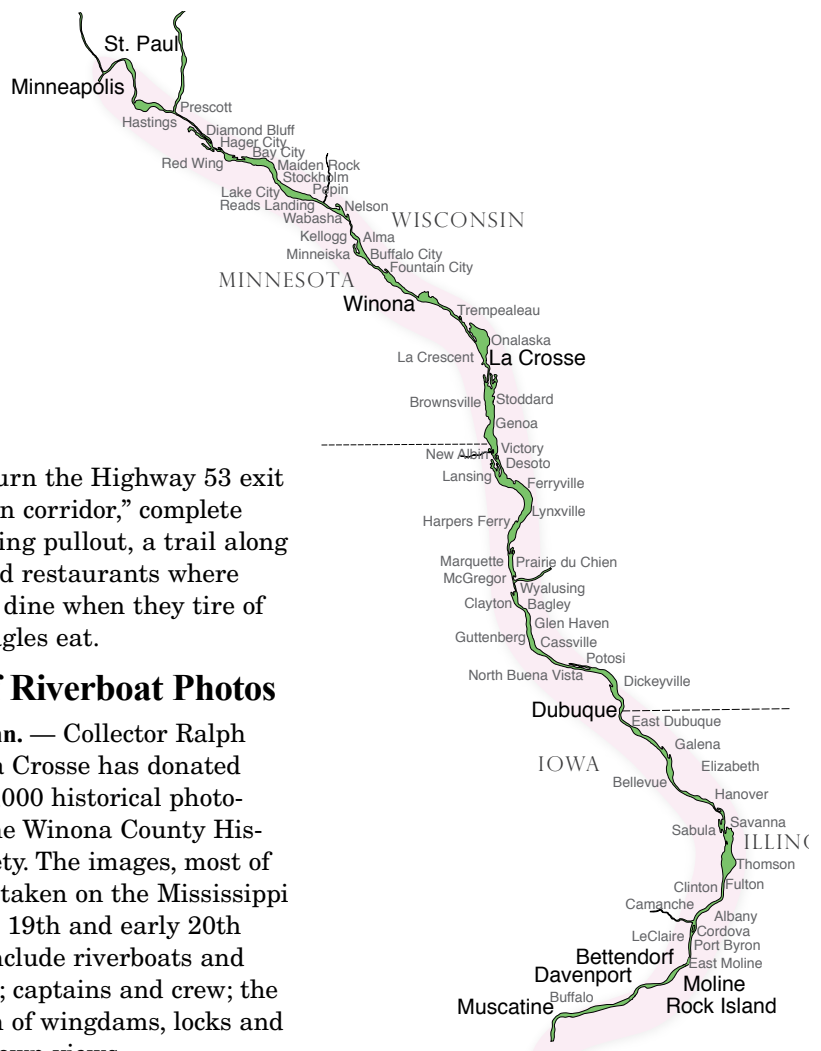
DuPae spent more than 30 years finding old photographs and getting permission to copy them, from collectors, river pilots and river history buffs across the country (see "Steamboat Photo Sleuth Extraordinaire," *Big River*, September-October 2006).

The historical society's archive already included artifacts, books and 5,000 photos, many of which are originals. DuPae's photos make the collection the largest in the United States.

"This donation greatly adds to our own collection of original photographs, artifacts and Mississippi River books, and makes it more significant," said historical society director Mark Peterson. "It will become more and more valuable as Winona State University develops its river studies center."

Saving the Lone Star

LeClaire, Iowa — The last existing wooden-hulled paddlewheeler to ply



the Mississippi will be protected and restored, thanks to \$750,000 in grants, public donations and private gifts.

The Lone Star began hauling lumber on the river in 1869 and didn't retire until 1968. It is currently stored next to the Buffalo Bill Museum in LeClaire. Years of exposure have damaged the boat.

The surprise donation that capped phase one of the fundraising campaign came from a visitor from Tennessee who inquired about the museum's progress in raising funds, then sat down and wrote a check for \$8,000, saying, "I had a pretty good year, and I just wanted to go and help the museum out."

After the wood and machinery on

Visit www.big-river.com for links to information about stories marked with the mouse 8.



Stream Through Sandbars, St. Croix River, watercolor by Vera Ming Wong.

Letter to the Editor

Reggie and others!

I have to say I was outraged when I saw the latest issue of *Big River Magazine*. The article (plus cover heading, too) about the development of condos along the shores of the Mississippi really struck me as totally inappropriate for your magazine. I've looked upon you folks as advocates of the River...protectors...not promulgators of development. While the article did give some heartening news that not all condo developments are meeting with favorability by local citizens, I feel that there was enough information in there to give the entire article a positive spin on development. I look upon the condos at Lake City and Pepin as highly undesirable features of "the Great River Road" which is beginning to look "not so Great" these days. The amount of development both on the river and along the Great River Road deeply disturbs me.

Mary Kay Salwey
Alma, WI

Editor's Note:

We present a broad range of perspectives in *Big River Magazine*. The condominium story mainly addressed the question of whether the market was overdeveloped. In the course of the story the author presented the views of developers as well as skeptics.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Department of Defense, the Parks and Trails Council and others, 552 acres were added to Crow Wing State Park, which is on the Mississippi River in northern Minnesota. The new land adds 3.13 miles of riverfront to the park. It also creates a link to the Paul Bunyan Trail, a 110-mile recreational trail that extends north to Bemidji State Park, also on the Mississippi River.

Just across the Mississippi River

the 137-year-old, 90-ton boat are repaired, it will be mounted on a platform and enclosed in a glass house near the museum. (Argus-Dispatch, 1-4-07, Quad-City Times, 1-2-07)

Art for Nature

Minneapolis — Seventeen regional artists will show their work at the Bell Museum on the campus of the University of Minnesota, in a show

"We hope to offer the public an intimate view of what we all stand to lose, but hope to preserve."

called "Project Art for Nature," celebrating Wisconsin and Minnesota's wild places.

Working in teams of two or three, the artists visited a variety of sites several times to create 120 paintings, pastels, collages, fiber art, books and sculptures.

"Whether protected, in need of maintenance or restoration, or surviving through benign neglect, all the areas chosen by the artists provide diminishing habitat for precious native flora and fauna," said artist Vera Ming Wong. (See "Floating Pastures" by Wong, July-August 2005.) "We hope to offer the public an intimate view of what we all stand to lose, but hope to preserve."

Cool Rocks & Fault

New Madrid, Mo. — Recent testing has disproved a recent theory about the New Madrid Seismic Zone, which centers on the central Mississippi River. The rocks under the zone are not hotter, as was theorized, and are "essentially no different from other sites in the eastern United States," said Jason R. McKenna, coauthor of a study undertaken by the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center. In fact, there is evidence that the fault may be shutting down. Data showed no movement along the fault.

Huge earthquakes rocked the zone several times in the last 1,200 years: in 900 A.D.; 1450 A.D.; three big ones within a three-month period in 1811 and 1812; and another in 1968. The fault extends from northeast Arkansas through southeast Missouri, western Tennessee and western Kentucky to southern Illinois.

Researchers would like to know why earthquakes center here and when another big one might hit. The central river valley is much more populated now than it was in the early 1800s. (Science Daily, 12-29-06)

New Park & Trail Links

Brainerd, Minn. — In a December land deal involving the Minnesota

from Crow Wing State Park, a new park will be created on 63 acres of newly-acquired forest, wetland and meadow. The city of Baxter joined forces with the DNR, the Department of Defense, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land to ante up the \$1.2 million purchase price.

Blanding's turtles, red-shouldered hawks and gray wolves reside here.

No Trapping in Town

Winona, Minn. — Trapping is no longer permitted within the city limits of Winona, except for the sloughs around the Winona airport, land east of the wastewater treatment plant, and Latsch Island and Aghaming Park, all on the margins of town. The Winona City Council adopted the ordinance in January after discovering that the city had no ordinances prohibiting traps. The new law came after a family on a hike in a wooded hillside park found their dog caught in a trap.

The state of Minnesota licenses traps, but does not specify where they can and cannot be placed.

Building Bigger Muskies

St. Paul — The muskellunge is a fierce fighting fish and a trophy catch. Muskie anglers want to keep it that way, by making sure the fish has a chance to grow really big.

With widespread support from anglers, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources increased the minimum catch size from 40 inches to 48 inches on 46 lakes and streams. It has also established the stretch of the Mississippi River from the Blandin Dam in Grand Rapids, Minn., to the Coon Rapids dam, upstream from the Twin Cities, as a catch-and-release area. The new regulations take effect March 1, 2007.

Two Tow Groups Merge

St. Louis — The Midwest Area River Coalition (MARC 2000) will merge with the Waterways Council Inc. in 2007. Both groups have lobbied to gain approval for the Army Corps of Engineers' plan to expand locks and

dams on the Mississippi, which was part of WRDA (Water Resources Development Act) before it died at the end of the last legislative session.

In announcing the merger, Waterways Council chairman Mark Knoy said he hoped it would allow the industry to "speak with one nationally authoritative voice on issues related to inland waterway infrastructure." (Farm Futures 12-19-06)

River Power

Quincy & Rock Island, Ill. — Harnessing the river for electricity is looking good to cities these days.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission recently awarded the city of Quincy permits to study the feasibility of building hydroelectric plants at three sites on the Mississippi River. The city will update old Army Corps of Engineers' reports from 1983, which showed that Lock and Dam 20 at Canton, Mo.; Lock and Dam 21 at Quincy, Ill.; and Lock and Dam 22 at Saverton, Mo., could each produce from 11 to 27 megawatts of power. The city estimates that construction costs could range from \$1.5 to \$2.0 million for each megawatt of energy a plant could produce.

Before Quincy stepped forward, an Ohio power company held permits for most of the locks and dams on the Upper Mississippi, but let the permits lapse.

Meanwhile, the city of Rock Island has hired consultants to investigate the feasibility of purchasing a private hydroelectric power plant on the Rock River to power municipal facilities. (Quincy Herald Whig, 12-17-06, Quad-City Times, 1-8-07)

Lend a Hand

Baraboo, Wis. — The Annual Midwest Crane Count, Saturday, April 14, from 5:30 to 7:30 a.m., needs volunteers in more than 100 counties in Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Michigan.

Sandhill cranes have rebounded in the Midwest from a low of just 25 breeding pairs in 1932 to more than 13,000. The count was organized to measure how many have returned from their wintering grounds and

Twelve Millennia: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River



By Robert "Ernie" Boszhardt
and James L. Theler

Jim and Ernie's book provides an overview of 12,000 years of human past in the Upper Mississippi River Valley. The book begins with an introduction to archaeology and a history of the archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River, followed by a summary of the environment of the valley since the end of the Ice Age. The book tells the story of Native American cultures from the Ice Age when humans lived alongside mammoths and mastodons, through the Woodland cultures and into the days of the Onecota, up to the era of European contact and the end of prehistory. A summary of animal bone remains from archaeological sites in the Driftless Area, a brief synthesis of regional rock art, and a guide to archaeological sites are included.

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where they are nesting.

For information, go to the web site of the International Crane Foundation, which sponsors the event.

Two months later, the river clean-up season will kick off with the Annual National River Cleanup Week from June 2 through 10. Sponsored by American Rivers, the event encourages people to organize new river cleanups and to volunteer at existing ones. Register online by April 15 for free trash bags and a chance to win canoes and kayaks.

For more information see the National River Cleanup web site. 8

Low Water & Traffic

Less than 200,000 tons of cargo were shipped by barge on the Missouri River in 2006, less than any year since 1955, according to the Army Corps of Engineers. Drought and low water levels closed the shipping season 48 days early this year, before the autumn harvest. However, even without the drought, barge traffic has decreased since the 1970s. Swift river currents and railroad competition have also been blamed for the shipping decrease.

The Corps spent millions of dollars to stabilize the channel decades ago, hoping to provide a cheap way to transport agricultural products, asphalt, concrete and other goods.

St. Joseph, Mo., spent \$1.3 million to build a new port in 2003. That port saw only two tows this year. (Kansas City Star, 12-28-06)

River Lessons

East Moline, Ill. — Living Lands & Waters, the nonprofit river-cleanup group, will fund and provide day-long workshops for both teachers and students this summer and fall. The workshops will cover history, shipping, watersheds, pollution, deforestation, mussels, invasive species and more.

Workshops in previous years were open only to teachers, because of safety concerns. This year's schedule includes 16 workshops, with a two-day excursion from Burlington, Iowa, to the Quad Cities. The workshops are free.

Living Lands & Waters founder Chad Pegracke won a "People Are Today's Heroes" award from Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich in January, for his work to clean up Illinois and Iowa rivers.

Ethanol & Atrazine

Concerned that the growth of the ethanol industry will increase corn production, which will increase use of the herbicide atrazine, which will end up in the environment, the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee (UMRCC) asked biology professor Tyrone Hayes of the University of California-Berkeley to speak at its annual conference March 20 to 22 in Red Wing, Minn.

Hayes has spent years researching a link between Atrazine, a pesticide used on corn, and frog deformities. The Swiss firm Syngenta, which manufactures Atrazine and originally funded Hayes' research, disputes his claim that atrazine in water causes chemical castration in frog tadpoles, resulting in many deformities, and that similar endocrine disruption occurs in humans, causing mutations that are similar to those found in breast cancer.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Atrazine was the second most frequently detected pesticide in the agency's survey of pesticides in drinking water wells, and was found in groundwater at concentrations above the Maximum Contaminant Level in many states, including Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri.

The UMRCC is a multi-state organization that focuses on an 800-mile stretch of the Mississippi River from Hastings, Minn., to its confluence with the Ohio River. Members are primarily scientists and researchers from state departments of natural resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Buffalo Ethanol

Davenport, Iowa — The River/Gulf Grain Company has two more years to move from the Davenport riverfront, making room for green space and commercial and residential

A History of Wapasha's Prairie
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Photo Contest Winner



Tim Mason took this picture in late December 2006 just north of Marquette, Iowa, on the Main Channel near river mile 635.

Send entries for the May-June issue contest to Big River by March 19. If we select your photo to print in these pages, we'll send you three free copies of the magazine. The contest is open to amateurs, 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, PO 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.

development. The Davenport levee improvement commission granted the extension this winter, citing the company as an important part of an evolving industry.

River/Gulf is one of a few locally-owned and operated independent grain companies operating on the Mississippi. In its request for an extension, the company said it needed more time to move its shipping facility, because it now plans to build an ethanol plant in Buffalo, which will take 15 months.

Fifty-five ethanol plants currently operate in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and another 16 plants are under construction, according to Ethanol Producer Magazine.

Defending the Lakes

The latest invasive species to enter the Great Lakes by way of ships' ballast water is viral hemorrhagic septicemia, a European virus that

The U.S. Coast Guard has dropped the idea of setting up 34 live-machine-gun training grounds on Lake Superior.

causes hemorrhaging and death in fish, but has no effect on humans. It is spreading rapidly to many species of fish that were not thought to be susceptible.

In response, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued an emer-

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gency order prohibiting the import of certain live fish from Ontario and Quebec, and the interstate shipping of those fish among eight states, including Minnesota and Wisconsin. The list of fish includes about 20 that are common in the Upper Mississippi. Critics said the order is not enforceable and would not affect ships' ballast water.

Meanwhile, a new Michigan law requires all ships with ballast tanks that have floated on salt water to either keep the ballast on board while in Michigan ports or use a state-approved method to treat it to make sure it's clean. Similar laws are being considered in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Great Lakes fish are still under siege, but anglers are safer, now that the U.S. Coast Guard has dropped the idea of setting up 34 live-machine-gun training grounds on Lake Superior. Fierce opposition to the plan arose from boaters, environmental groups and the mayors of 80 cities after 24 live-fire sessions last year.

An agreement to prevent any diversion of lake water outside the Great Lakes basin is being considered by nine Great Lakes states and Canada. The bill passed Minnesota's House Environment and Natural Resources Committee in January. It would prevent projects like the proposal to pump water to Texas or the Southwest via pipelines along Interstate 35.

Refuge Cuts & Kudos

Winona, Minn. — Budget cuts will reduce personnel levels on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and other refuges throughout the Midwest. Seventy-one positions will be eliminated through attrition or retirement in the next three years; 35 positions are already vacant and will not be filled.

Three refuges, Hamden Slough and Crane Meadows in central Minnesota, and Driftless Area in north-east Iowa, will lose all staff.

The agency's regional budget of \$28.5 million a year has not in-

creased since 2004. It manages more than 54 refuges, including Upper Miss, which gets more visitors than any other refuge in the United States.

Upper Miss Refuge manager Don Hultman will receive the 2007 Refuge Manager of the Year Award from the nonprofit National Wildlife Refuge Association, in March. Hultman, who is in charge of 11 refuges along 261 miles of the river, rode herd over a stormy four-year refuge planning process, finally producing the Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan in August 2006.

Bellevue Boom

Bellevue, Iowa — The quiet town of Bellevue, population 2,400, is waking up to development opportunities. Having long served as a bedroom community for nearby Dubuque and Clinton, the town has decided to exploit its river location.

In various stages of development are 50 condominiums and 110 single-family residential lots, 41 of which overlook the river and have

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“million-dollar views,” according to city administrator Loras Herrig. Meanwhile, area developer A.J. Spiegel has purchased more than 40 acres north of town, where he hopes to build another 200 to 300 condominiums

There are good reasons for such growth, said Herrig. “We are being discovered by people who want to retire and who like to hunt, fish and boat. If you like nature, this is the place to be.”

Mooney Hollow Revival

Bellevue, Iowa — A river town tradition has been revived at the Mooney Hollow Barn, an old country dance and music hall 10 miles south of Bellevue.

Built in 1932 as a dairy barn, it was used for that purpose for 45 years until a new owner began using the top floor for dances. At first, guests climbed a ladder and danced above the livestock, to music by country musicians, including such greats as Roy Acuff, Bill Monroe, Ernest Tubbs and Porter Wagner. In the mid 1980s, the barn was sold again, and the music nearly stopped, except for an annual all-night dance and jam session.

Kevin and Vonnie Petesch, of Bellevue, who bought the barn in 2006, are bringing back the music. The house band plays on the first and third Saturday night of the month. The second, fourth, and fifth Saturdays showcase other local bands playing old to modern country music. Guests are invited to bring their dancing shoes and their own food and beverages.

Mooney Hollow is on U.S. 52. Look for the gigantic fiddle painted on the silo next to it.

Carp Advance

Clinton, Iowa — Asian silver carp gained ground, or rather river, last year. They’re now found as far north in the Mississippi River as Clinton, Iowa, and Fulton, Ill.

“They’re just starting to get here,” said Ed Britton, manager of the Savanna District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Savanna, Ill.

The carp have been making their way up the Mississippi, but most are blocked by Lock and Dam 19, because the dam operates continuously. However, some probably locked through “just like a towboat,” said Kevin Irons of the Illinois Natural History Survey.

The large fish — which often grows to 15 to 20 pounds and can grow larger than 50 pounds — may become a threat. They are so large and such voracious eaters that, like the Asian bighead carp, they compete for food with native species, such as paddlefish, bigmouth buffalo and gizzard shad. They consume two to three times their weight in plankton each day.

In addition, they pose a threat to boaters, because they often leap as high as nine feet, and can jump into boats or knock people out of them.

Nuke Leaves Fish Cold

Monticello, Minn. — Three thousand fish accustomed to thriving in the warm discharge water of a nuclear power plant died of thermal shock in January when Xcel Energy’s Monticello plant, about 50 miles upstream of Minneapolis, suddenly shut down.

The plant’s safety system shut it down abruptly Jan. 10 when a 35,000-pound control box fell from a steel beam onto a steam pipe. Vibration and/or routine wear and tear caused the fall that triggered the shutdown, according to Xcel Energy.

The nuclear plant uses river water as a coolant. The warm water it discharges isn’t radioactive but still warms Mississippi River water to around 75 to 80° F.

During scheduled winter shutdowns, Xcel said, it tries to cool the water slowly, which kills fewer fish.

Most of the dead fish were six inches long or less. About 2,400 were smallmouth bass. Many of the rest were rough fish, reported the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Bigger fish stay in colder water, according to Xcel Energy biologist Daniel Orr.

The warm discharge water “tends to concentrate the smaller



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fish," he adds. "I think it's easier for them to survive. They move into these warm-water areas to feed."

The shutdown also disrupted birds that like to winter in the warm water. A neighbor, Sheila Lawrence, who has fed ducks, geese and swans in her backyard for 20 years, counted 1,175 swans in her yard about a week after the shutdown, according to WCCO News.

Early Birds?

St. Paul — The warm early winter altered bird migration patterns on the Upper Mississippi. What spring will bring is anybody's guess.

Many birds migrated south, but not as far as usual. Audubon's annual Christmas bird count showed many species staying well north of their usual winter range.

"With warmer weather we see some birds either moving north or staying farther north," says Mark Martell, director of bird conservation for Audubon Minnesota in Woodbury.

Come spring, they may nest earlier, and migrating waterfowl may

move through more quickly.

Snow geese and ospreys seem to know whether their breeding grounds are thawed as they move up the river in stages, said Martell. They wait where water is open and advance when they're ready. But will warblers wintering in Central America and South America time their arrival wrong?

If spring comes early on the Upper Mississippi, an early insect hatch may mean warbler's favorite bugs get eaten by other predators before the warblers arrive.

"The warbler migration typically is timed to insects," said Martell. "If those things occur earlier because of warmer weather, it may upset the birds' food supply."

End of Pepin

Lake City, Minn. — Is Lake Pepin silting in even faster than previously feared? Researchers will take more sediment cores this spring to find out.

Earlier studies showed that at current rates the upper lake will fill in by 2100 and the lower lake all

but disappear in about 340 years.

Most of the sediment comes from the Minnesota River, which joins the Mississippi at St. Paul. Extreme weather and tiling in the Minnesota's watershed may speed up silting of the 20-mile long Lake Pepin.

The fastest silting began in the 1940s, according to Dan Engstrom, a Science Museum of Minnesota researcher who will "fingerprint" sediment from cores taken from Pepin in May or June to find its source. And then?

"The solution is, of course, a matter of farm policy and practice," Engstrom said.

If more sediment is coming from stream banks than 10 years ago, it may be due to faster runoff caused by tiling of agricultural fields.

Lake Pepin made Minnesota's 2004 list of impaired waters for excess nutrients that cause algae blooms, particularly during low-flow periods, and for turbidity from sedimentation. The federal Clean Water Act requires states to list impaired waters every two years. Minnesota's 2006 list includes 1,008 lakes and



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296 rivers. State agencies, local organizations and others sample water to determine so-called TMDLs, or total maximum daily loads.

Lake Pepin, a 40-square-mile natural lake on the Mississippi River with a mean depth of 18 feet, drains half of Minnesota.

River Highway Exit

Guttenberg, Iowa — Guttenberg plans to use the \$500,000 grant for being named one of Iowa's six "Great Places" to build a 50-slip marina near downtown. Construction is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2007, if agency approvals are granted.

The new marina will be a half-mile south of Lock and Dam 10, near the Iowa Department of Natural Resources boat ramp and The Landing, a historic button factory renovated into an inn that is also a boating landmark. The town's existing marina is on the north edge of town, about a mile from downtown.

M.J. Smith, volunteer and member of the Iowa Mississippi Parkway Commission, said, "We always felt as though the Mississippi was our interstate highway, but with no easy exit to our downtown."

The city will also apply for a state grant to help fund completion of a two-mile trail along the river's edge. The paved path would run from the aquarium to the new marina, roughly parallel to the River Walk, which lies higher up the riverbank, through Ingleside Park.

Wacky Classes

Davenport, Iowa — Firefighters won't get to zip down the water slide, but they can to repel off the tower and bob around in the wave pool.

Eastern Iowa Community College purchased Wacky Waters, a 30-acre water park north of Interstate 80 in north Davenport, for \$1.2 million to use as a training site for its Midwest Center for Safety and Rescue Training program. The college plans to offer an associate degree in firefighter science in the fall of 2007.

The 22-year-old water park will serve as a classroom for students

practicing dangerous rescues on the river and the bluffs. They'll use the water slide tower to practice rope rescues and the wave pool to simulate a stormy river. A small marina may be added for boat fire training.

Development Brewing

St. Paul — The Schmidt Brewery has frothy history. The brewery has stood on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi since the mid-1800s because of the deep caves in the bluffs below. Rumor says the beer never stopped flowing in the basement during Prohibition. In the 1930s the famed Ma Barker-Creepy Karpis gang kidnapped the brewery company's son and held him for ransom, but when President Franklin Roosevelt railed against the crime, they released him. After passing from one beer-making company to another for several decades, and then seeing service as the country's only urban ethanol plant, the brewery may soon become a "historic urban village."

Developers Jeff and Craig Cohen bought the site in January and plan to establish a residential and retail development called "Brewtown." The 15-acre beer-making compound features cobblestone streets and brick buildings with castle-like towers.

Too Much Nature?

East Dupa, Ill. — You might see a lot more nude volleyball on the river after the U.S. Supreme Court hears the case between a church group, excursion tour boat owners and an Iowa nudists club.

The dispute arose in the summer of 2003, after a church group on a Sunday afternoon cruise sued owners of the excursion boat Lily White for cruising too close to an island beach where a senior nudist club was playing volleyball. The excursion boat owners, in turn, sued the owners of Johnson Island, who are nudists and claim that the suit violates their right to free speech.

Recent research conducted at the University of Northern Iowa found that naturist children have body self-concepts that are significantly more positive than those of non-naturist children. ♦

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Recent, old and ancient burials share Riverside Cemetery.

Resting with the Ancients

Story and Photographs by Robert Boszhardt

Headstones of the Finch family stand within a low stone wall on an ancient grassy mound in Riverside Cemetery, just upstream from Genoa, Wis. This gentle hillside is a good site for a cemetery, situated at the mouth of a small spring-fed valley and offering an inspiring view of the Mississippi River. That may be why about 2,000 years ago native people built this mound and 10 others that rise among and beneath the more recent grave markers. Some or all of the mounds were burial mounds.

Until the mid-19th century, nearly all of the Upper Mississippi River Valley was Indian land, occupied by numerous tribes including the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Eastern Dakota Sioux, Sauk and Mesquakie (Fox). In the 1820s European-American lead miners en-

croached on Indian territory in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, setting off years of trouble that climaxed in the 1832 Black Hawk War. That conflict ended on the banks of the Mississippi a few miles south of here, at the Battle at Bad Axe (often referred to as a massacre). It provided the excuse for removing these tribes to the west side of the Mississippi. By 1840 the U.S. government had wrangled treaties from the Sauk, Mesquakie and Ho-Chunk tribes to cede nearly all of their land east of the river, and Army troops began moving them across the river. Within a decade, government agents surveyed the land, and the massive white immigration into the Upper Mississippi Valley began.

Long before the Black Hawk War this land was home to a series of

native cultures. Nineteenth-century settlers did not know that ancestors of the Indians had lived here for nearly 12,000 years, but evidence of those earlier cultures existed virtually everywhere. The first plows brought up spear tips, arrowheads, pottery, ground-stone axes, pipes and other artifacts. Even more obvious were thousands of earthworks across the landscape — nearly 20,000 in Wisconsin alone.

In the mid-19th century most Americans believed that these mounds were monuments of a lost civilization that had been overrun by the “red savages.” And so, farmers plowed into the native prairies and planted fields. The settlers built roads, schools, churches and towns — in the process leveling thousands of mounds, only occasionally noting what they found in them.

A few people saw the mounds differently. As early as 1836, Increase A. Lapham wrote from his Milwaukee home of an elaborately shaped “turtle” mound, and implored citizens to protect the unique animal-shaped “effigy” mounds of this region:

“Our object...is not so much to

It was not until 1988 that the Wisconsin legislature passed a law protecting burial mounds. By that time, nearly 80 percent of the mounds that once dotted the Upper Mississippi River Valley were gone.

describe any new or interesting discovery, as to call attention to those living near them..., and to make an earnest appeal to the proprietors of the land on which they are found for their preservation. Many of the works of this kind in the United States are now entirely destroyed, or so much injured as to lose all their interest in the eyes of the antiquarian. Let us hope that in Wisconsin, the case will be different — that here at least the future traveler will not have to regret the loss of those records of an ancient people. Now is the time, when the country is yet new, to take the necessary measures for their preservation...”

Lapham’s appeals to preserve mounds went largely unheeded. By the 1890s the Bureau of American Ethnology had established that the ancestors of the Indians built the mounds, and preservation efforts gained some success in the early 20th century, but earthworks continued to be wantonly destroyed. Indeed, it was not until 1988 that the Wisconsin legislature passed a law protecting burial mounds. By that time, nearly 80 percent of the mounds that once dotted the Upper Mississippi River Valley were gone. Some were preserved in parks, such as Effigy Mounds National Monument and Pikes Peak State Park in northeast Iowa, and Perrot, Wy-

alusing and Nelson Dewey state parks in Wisconsin.

Ironically, a few Indian burial mounds were preserved because they were chosen as cemetery plots by 19th-century settlers. The small Riverside Cemetery just north of Genoa is one of a few such mound cemeteries near the Mississippi. The mounds at Riverside Cemetery were first recorded by none other than Increase Lapham.

Lapham’s interest in Wisconsin antiquities culminated in a three-year field project, from 1849 to 1852, in which he recorded numerous mound groups across the southern part of the state. During the last year of this project, Lapham rode his horse, Billy, from Milwaukee to the Upper Mississippi Valley. He arrived at the young river town of La Crosse in early June, sick with “ague and fe-



These Hopewell ceremonial knives were found in a large conical mound near Trempealeau, Wis. The one in the lower left is made from obsidian, and the others from flint stone sources in Wyoming and the Dakotas. The large knife in the center is almost 20 inches long.



This Hopewell platform pipe is nearly eight inches long — the largest of four collected from a conical mound in the Bartlett Landing group when it was destroyed in 1906. It is made of pipestone from north-central Illinois.



The Finch family burial plot is centered on a 2,000-year-old Hopewell mound.



Riverside Cemetery is about two miles north of Genoa off Wisconsin Hwy 35.

ver,” yet he managed to record several sites as he recuperated.

On June 11, Lapham rode Billy down the river trail from La Crosse. Along the way, he noted mounds near Chipmunk and “Raccoon” (now Coon) creeks. Late in the day he reached Bartlett’s Landing at the mouth of Spring Valley, between the modern river towns of Stoddard and Genoa. He stopped and sketched a group of more than 75 earthworks on the crest of a narrow ridge some 40 feet above Raccoon Slough. The group consisted primarily of round, or conical, mounds, but there were also several elongated linear mounds and one shaped like a bear. The ridge was undeveloped, al-

though two houses and a cultivated field were nearby, and a road heading up the small valley cut across one of the linear mounds.

This survey and others compiled by Lapham were published in his classic book *The Antiquities of Wisconsin as Surveyed and Described*, an 1855 issue of the Smithsonian Institution’s *Contributions to Knowledge* (which was republished in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries in 2001). Although most of the book consisted of his handsome drawings of mound groups and artifacts, Lapham’s book also argued that ancestors of the Native American tribes created the mounds and

urged preservation of these irreplaceable features of the cultural landscape.

Within five years of Lapham’s mapping of the mounds near Genoa, now called the Bartlett Landing Mound Group, white settlers began burying their dead on the crest of the same narrow ridge. Records are sparse for the earliest settlers buried there — some of their names have been lost to history and their graves have no headstones. By 1882, the Town of Bergen established a cemetery association to manage and record the burials in the nondenominational Riverside Cemetery.

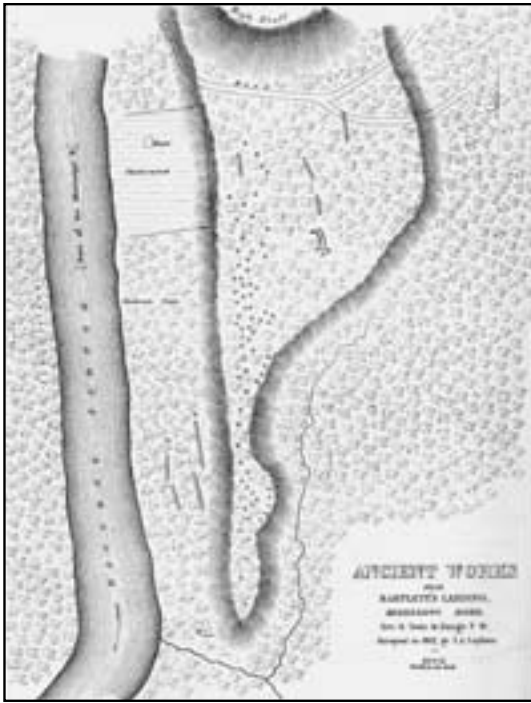
From the Great River Road, Riverside Cemetery is visible on the natural ridge and is accessible by a short gravel road, which becomes grass inside the arched entryway. The oldest known burial is that of Isidora Warner who passed away in 1857. Later, in 1882, Sarah Finch and her unnamed twin children died and were buried in plot 24, near the entrance to the cemetery. The Finch family plot is outlined by a square limestone wall and marked by a large headstone, which is set on the crest of a conical mound. Other round mounds are visible nearby, with headstones from historic burials intruding into the prehistoric monuments.

The 11 mounds range in size from about 10 feet across and 2 feet high to 30 feet across and 4 or 5 feet high. Large conical mounds like these are typical of the Hopewell Culture, which reached much of eastern North America between 100 B.C. and 400 A.D. Hopewell mounds that were excavated by archaeologists in the 19th and early 20th centuries typically contained subterranean burial chambers and remains of several individuals, often with ceremonial objects manufactured from materials that traveled incredible distances. Excavations of Hopewell Mounds along the Upper Mississippi River by the Bureau of American Ethnology in the 1880s found chipped blocks made of obsidian (a natural volcanic glass that originated in the Rocky Moun-

HOPEWELL MOUNDS ON THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI

You can see Hopewell mounds at a number of sites along the Mississippi River:

- Indian Mound Park, Dayton’s Bluff, St. Paul.
- Brady’s Bluff, Perrot State Park, Trempealeau, Wis.
- Nicholls Mound, south of Trempealeau, Wis., on the Great River State Trail.
- Fish Farm Mounds State Preserve, Hwy 26 between New Albin and Lansing, Iowa.
- Riverside Cemetery, north of Genoa, Wis.
- Sandy Point Cemetery, Harpers Ferry, Iowa.
- Effigy Mound National Monument, between Lansing and Marquette, Iowa.
- Villa Louis, St. Feriole Island, Prairie du Chien, Wis.
- Pikes Peak State Park, McGregor, Iowa.
- Wyalusing State Park, Bagley, Wis.
- Nelson Dewey State Park, Cassville, Wis.
- Little Maquoketa River Mounds State Preserve, on Hwy 52 north of Dubuque, Iowa.
- Gramercy Park, East Dubuque, Ill.
- Albany Mounds State Historic Site, Albany, Ill.



There were over 75 Indian mounds at Bartlett's Landing in Increase A. Lapham's published version of his 1852 sketch map. The last 11 of the mounds in this group are preserved in Riverside Cemetery, located at the bulge in the ridge near the south end.

tains); large ceremonial knives made of other flints from the northern Plains; copper axes and ornaments from Lake Superior; platform pipes from southwestern Minnesota and northern Illinois; pots manufactured in and imported from central Illinois or perhaps Ohio; and other exotic grave offerings.

Many Hopewell grave offerings served no practical function and were apparently made specifically for ceremonial purposes. They often included exceptionally large spear points and knives, made of exotic stone. Some of these are more than a foot long, too large for practical use. Occasionally the discovery of these giant weapons led to rumors about giant skeletons.

The linear mounds and the bear effigy mound that Lapham mapped were probably built by Late Woodland people between 400 and 1000 AD.

Lapham mapped more than 75 mounds on this ridge. All but the 11 in Riverside Cemetery are now gone. Plowing and, more recently, home construction, obliterated them. Nothing is known about the human remains or grave offerings that undoubtedly were unearthed as these mounds were destroyed — with one exception. In 1908, avocational archaeologist George West

documented a set of four pipes and a miniature pot found along with “a number of badly decomposed human bones” during the destruction of a conical mounds in this group. West obtained the pipes and donated them to the Milwaukee Public Museum. They are classic Hopewell platform pipes made of green-tinted pipe-

estone. Recent analyses show that the greenish pipestone came from a newly discovered source near Sterling, Ill., nearly 100 miles to the south.

Before 1850, thousands of Native American earthen mounds existed along the Upper Mississippi River. Within a century and a half the vast majority were destroyed. Many of the few hundred remaining mounds are preserved in parks, while some are finally protected on private land. Some mounds, like those at Riverside Cemetery, a group at Harpers Ferry, Iowa, and a lone mound near Second Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien, Wis., are preserved in early European-American cemeteries. Or perhaps we should call them “prehistoric-Native-American-historic-European-American” cemeteries. The irony of headstones on prehistoric mounds is that, were it not for the historic burials, these mounds too may have been obliterated. ♦

Robert Boszhardt is an author and the regional archaeologist at the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. He and James L. Theler wrote Twelve Millennia: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Valley.

Did you know ...

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... where exactly the hull of the sternwheeler **CHRIS GREENE** is located on the banks of the Ohio River at Melbourne, KY?

... that the bell of the excursion steamer **AMERICA** is decorating a tombstone at a cemetery in New Orleans?

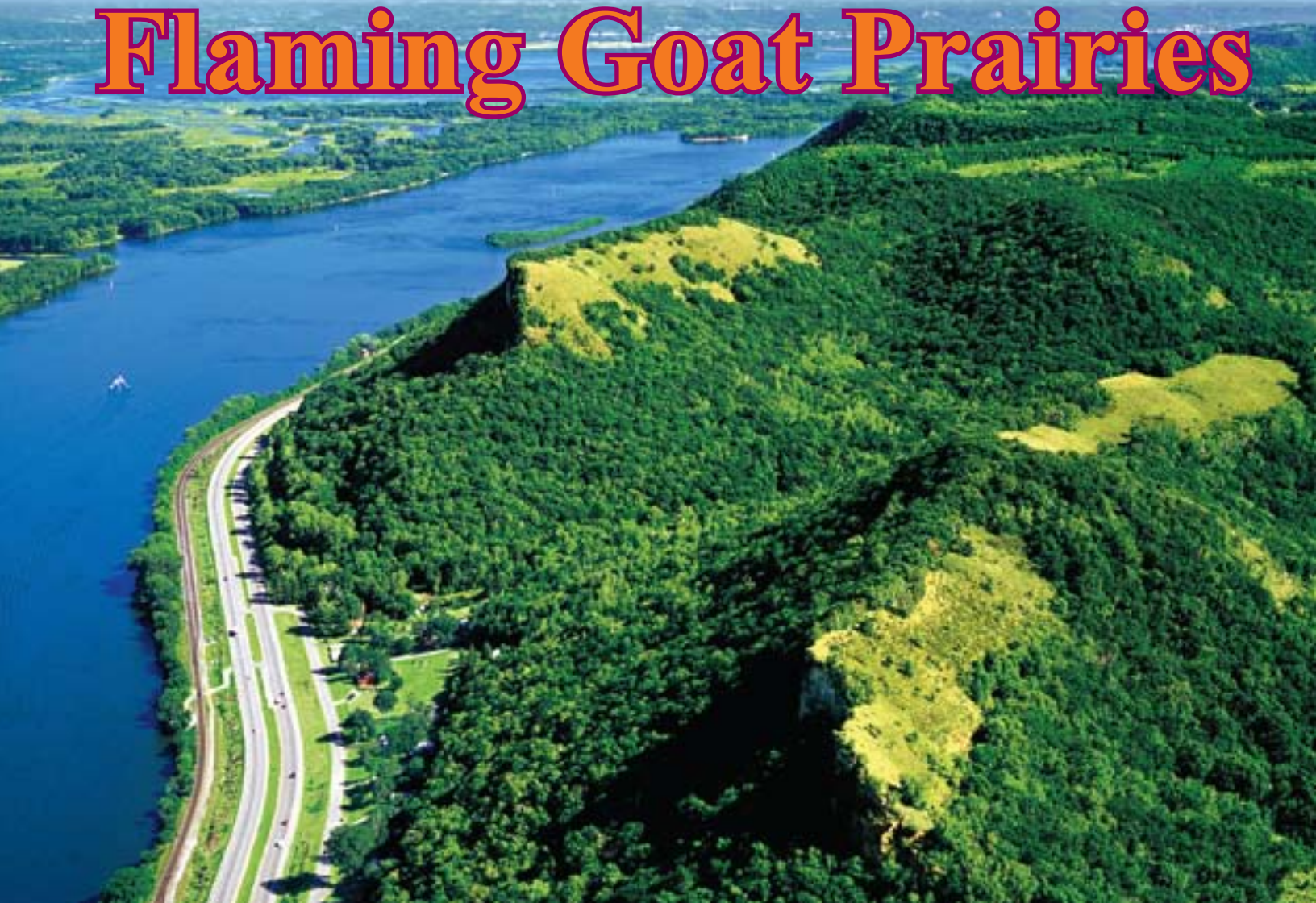
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Flaming Goat Prairies



By Pamela Eyden

Goat prairies crown Queen's Bluff (left) and King's Bluff (right) at Minnesota's Great River Bluffs State Park. (Robert J. Hurt)

Some of the last remnants of the vast prairies that once covered much of the river valley and the western plains still crown the hills overlooking the river. A great variety of flowers, grasses, reptiles and tiny snails share these embattled microcosms. **Only fire can save them.** For many, it's now or never.

Bald Hills

The tree-covered hills of the Upper Mississippi River valley look “natural” today, but 200 years ago, much of the hills and the floodplain were covered by prairie grassland.

On his upriver journey in 1805, Zebulon Pike described the river: “In this division of the Mississippi [below Lake Pepin], the shores are more than three-fourths prairie on both sides, or, more properly speaking, bald hills which, instead of running parallel with the river, form a continual succession of high perpendicular cliffs and low valleys; they appear to head on the river, and traverse the country in an angular direction.”

The land Pike saw was the result of centuries of management by Dakota, Ho-Chunk and other Indian people. They maintained the prairie by setting fire to it, so that fresh new grasses would attract buffalo, deer and other game every year. When the Indians were removed, the fires all but stopped and the trees started moving in.

Earth & Water

Goat prairies — also called bluff prairies and bed-rock bluff prairies — got their name because they're too steep for anything but goats. Usually found on hills that face south or southwest, directly into the sun, these slopes can be very steep. The sun is hot; rain runs right off; the soil is thin, dry and rocky. In winter, the slopes bake in the daytime sun and freeze at night.

The only plants that thrive in this fierce environment are dry prairie plants, such as little bluestem, Indian grass, switch grass, side-oats grama, compass plant, silky asters, hoary puccoon and bird's foot violet. Their narrow leaves conserve moisture and their roots spread into an extensive network to catch every drop of rain and runoff. Most important, their budding parts are under ground, so they can quickly spring up again after a fire.

"The goat prairies around here are a globally rare plant community. They support between 80 and 120 plant species, many of which are becoming rare," said Armund Bartz, ecologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "They're really unique — more diverse than western types of dry prairie."

Goat prairies are home to 13 species of lizards and snakes, including racerunners, blue racers, black ratsnakes and timber rattlesnakes, and more than 20 species of land snails.

They give a lift to birds, too. The columns of hot air that rise over goat prairies help bald eagles and other raptors spiral upward and gain altitude.



Some of the critters on goat prairies take some effort to spot.

Race runners (top) scamper across sand and rocks almost faster than the eye can see. (Driftless Land Stewardship)

Timber rattlers are nearly invisible lying among leaves and rocks. (Driftless Land Stewardship)



Hoary puccoon is an early blooming prairie flower. (USDA-Forest Service)

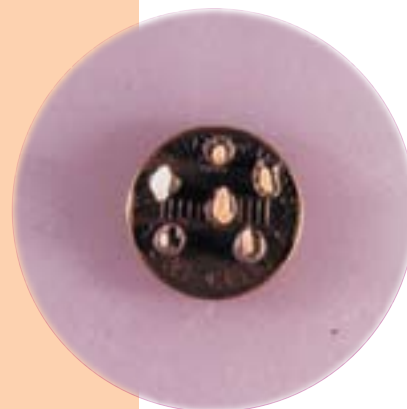
Wood

All kinds of woody plants and shrubs can get a toe-hold on goat prairies, but the greatest threat comes from another native plant — the eastern red cedar.

Red cedars are easy to spot. Look at any steep hillside facing south along the river or its tributaries, and you'll see dense clusters of dark green trees, or single trees scattered across the hillside, or walls of trees surrounding patches of goat prairie. You'll also find them clinging to the cliffs, digging their roots into what seems to be bare rock.

The eastern red cedar is actually a type of juniper (*Juniperus virginiana*). It has a red, stringy bark, and red fragrant wood that resists rotting and is traditionally used to make fence posts, as well as cedar chests, pencils and medicines. Female trees produce blue berries. Birds eat the berries, but can't digest the seeds, so they spread the seeds wherever they fly.

Two hundred years ago, when the Indians were burning the prairie regularly, the only cedars were in the steep ravines and narrow valleys where fire couldn't



More than 20 species of land snails live on river goat prairies, including these tiny ones, displayed on a penny. (Dr. James Theler)



Eastern red cedars are often the first trees to invade a goat prairie, but there are many other invaders — native, such as sumac and grey dogwood, and non-native, such as common buckthorn. (Curtiss Preuss)



get at them. Without fire, they are spreading out and taking over. They tolerate drought, but not fire.

Fire & Air

The best way to restore goat prairies is to burn them — usually in the spring, when last year's grasses have had a chance to dry out and the ground is moist, but snakes and lizards aren't out and about yet.

But first you have to deal with the big cedars.

“Nothing grows underneath cedar trees — the ground is bare — so you can't burn thick stands of mature trees without causing a crown fire, and that's very dangerous,” said Jesse Bennett, co-owner of Driftless Land Stewardship LLC, a Bagley, Wis.,-based company that specializes in natural area management. Crown fires run through the tops of the trees and easily get out of control.

Getting the cedars off the slope is tough work. Climbing a goat prairie is often a rugged, hands-and-knees proposition, even without lugging chainsaws and other equipment.

“You have to remove the trees by hand, because the land is too steep for any machine. We have a crew of 10 working on projects like this all winter. It's too hot up there in the summer,” said Bennett.

Big burns are complex and require the efforts of a dozen or more people. After the cedars are re-

moved and firebreaks established, the burn team gathers on a not-too-windy day and the burn leader outlines the strategy. Usually a line of slow fire is started at the top to move down the slope into the prevailing winds. Then the flanks of the hill are burned, and finally the center of the slope is burned, from the bottom up to where the first fire stopped.

Afterward, the once-brown hill is charcoal black. The

Without fire, cedars (dark green) and other trees and shrubs crowd out prairies. (Driftless Land Stewardship)



Burn crews use drip torches to extend the fire line at Limery Coulee, near Prairie du Chien, Wis. (Armund Bartz)

tender shoots of new plants emerge quickly, helped along by a spring rain or two.

“On goat prairies, more times than not, the prairie is just waiting to come back. You usually don’t have to seed it. All you do is restore the structure, remove the cedars, and what’s left is the natives,” Bennett said. “The rehabilitation potential of goat prairies is far greater than other kinds of prairie in the Midwest, except wetland prairies, which are also extreme.”

Nonetheless, it may take years for a goat prairie to come back. Burning every year for five or ten years, then every three to five years is optimal, according to Armund Bartz, Wisconsin DNR ecologist.

If you are interested in helping out with burns and helping old prairies make a comeback, contact your local land trust or conservancy. ♦

Pamela Eyden is Big River’s news and photo editor.



Hoary puccoon and blue-eyed grass emerge after a spring burn. (Armund Bartz)



White Bass

Handsome, Abundant and Underappreciated

By Pete Beurskens

A white bass is the whitest, most silvery fish you'll find in the Mississippi. And it is simply a pretty fish, perhaps the prettiest in the river. If you hold it up to the sun, it shines.

The white bass's good looks may be explained by the fact it is not related to the homely largemouth and smallmouth bass, which are black bass, members of the otherwise good-looking sunfish family. The white bass — Morone (unknown) chrysops (golden eye) — belongs to the Moronidae family, also known as the temperate basses. Its kin include the striped, yellow, kelp, and giant sea bass and the white perch (no relation to the yellow perch). Confused? It's understandable.

Anglers often confuse the 2-to-4-pound white bass with other fish, including the striped bass, an Atlantic saltwater/freshwater fish that

gets much larger and doesn't live in the Upper Midwest. The white perch may also be mistaken for the white bass, as may the yellow bass, which is similar in striping and in size to the white (though a bit

Anglers need not worry about limits, and can catch and keep dozens guilt free, because the fish are fast-growing, short-lived, fearsome predators and prolific reproducers.

smaller), but is better described as yellowish-silver rather than silvery-yellow or silvery-white. Then there are the white bass-yellow bass hybrid and the striped bass-white bass hybrid.

If this were not enough to flus-

ter anglers, the white bass goes by a variety of nicknames: white bass, silver bass, sand bass, sandies, white lake-bass, striped bass and stripers.

The white seems to have a public relations problem. When asked about white bass fishing, a couple of river fishermen just laughed. They were after walleyes, largemouth bass or northerns — status fish.

"Do you ever fish specifically for white bass?"

"No." Chuckle, chuckle.

"Do you know of anyone who does around here?"

"Only Iowans." Snicker, snicker.

A transplanted Iowan myself, I could only wonder at the remark, though it did remind me of an article in an old copy of Iowa Fish and Fishing. The writer noted that in many places where fisheries agencies had tried to establish crappies,

Iowa fishermen stubbornly persisted in going for bullheads.

Hmm.

Still, there are an elite few who stalk the white bass.

Some writers admire its fighting spirit and its schooling habits.

Careful anglers can catch buckets of the normally skittish fish by casting minnows, spinners or spoons into surface schools ferociously feeding on shad. They can fish for them in spring, summer, winter or fall. In the fall, white bass migrate in schools of thousands. In winter, they hang out closer to the bottom, also in large schools. In late winter and early spring, they “stage” in enormous numbers before spawning runs. Anglers need not worry about limits, and can catch and keep dozens guilt free, because the fish are fast-growing, short-lived, fearsome predators and prolific reproducers.

The white bass is pelagic — a roaming fish — and has an incredible homing sense. A single white bass may travel more than 100 miles in seasonal movements. A female can lay a half-million eggs. Large surface-feeding birds and predator fish likely rely on white bass for food. (Though little study has been done on what critters eat white bass, besides Iowans.) What’s more, the white bass is the state fish of Oklahoma. That’s something. Moreover, the fish is a native of the Midwest, not some marauding invader like the Asian carp.

In Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota anglers on the Mississippi can take home no more than 25 yellow and/or white bass of any size. In Illinois the daily limit is 25.

Some people claim that the fish is not worth keeping, even describing it as rancid, oily and muddy tasting. Others describe it as firm, white and tasty, fresh or smoked.



Ethan Beurskens shows off his white bass. (Pete Beurskens)

through the winter.

A couple of years ago, my son caught a white bass of about 15 inches in Lake Pepin off the jetty at Stockholm, Wis. We breaded and fried it. We found it quite tasty, in spite of its size and advanced age — it was probably about six years old. Lake Pepin is a good place to catch white bass, as are most large river lakes. Windy points and tailraces below Mississippi dams are also likely spots. Minnesota’s record white bass was caught on the Mississippi, in Pool 5. It was 4 lbs., 2.4 oz., and 18.5 inches long.

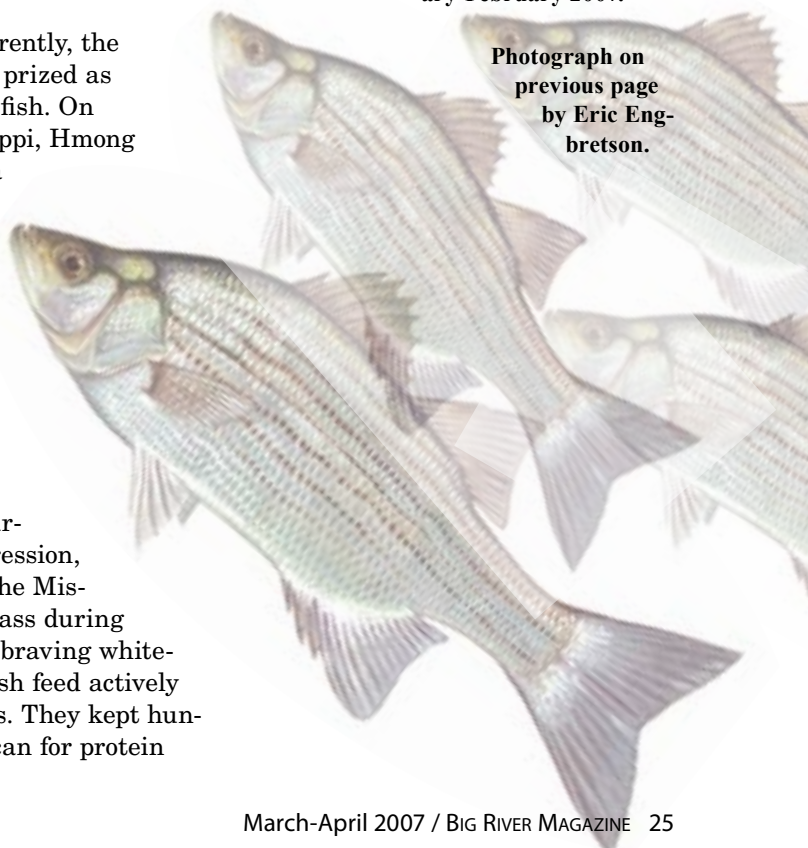
Though no Norman Maclean has emerged to write a novel sanctifying the white bass, and A. E. Housman never elegized it, there is this old saying: “When the dogwood trees are blooming, the white bass are spawning.” — humble, folksy poetry befitting this little great white of the Mississippi. ♦

Pete Beurskens is a writer based in River Falls, Wis. His last story was “River Condo Bubble?” January-February 2007.

In the South, apparently, the white bass is more prized as a sport and eating fish. On the Upper Mississippi, Hmong people value it as a food source. Kill-roys, a sporting goods shop in Hastings, Minn., sells out of spinners during white bass runs, selling most of the lures to Hmong anglers.

I read once that during the Great Depression, people would fish the Mississippi for white bass during the fall migration, braving whitecaps because the fish feed actively in windy conditions. They kept hundreds to freeze or can for protein

Photograph on previous page by Eric Engbretson.



(Riverbank continued from page 5)

bluffs; now I see them when I travel north.

Opossums used to literally freeze their tails off when they wandered up to Minnesota. They have become fairly common in the last decade — tails and all.

Fish and other animals in the Mississippi have the advantage of being able to shift north and south. Animals in east-west rivers are much more vulnerable to climate change. However, the locks and dams impede north-south movement on the Mississippi. For example, before the locks and dams were built, schools of skipjack herrings used to migrate from the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Pepin.

Although seeds of aquatic plants may occasionally be carried upstream on a duck's foot or a muskrat's coat, they are usually carried downstream by the current, which on the Mississippi means north to south. So, in the river, too, the movements of plants and animals will be uneven.

Perhaps one of the first native fish we will notice moving north

will be the blue catfish, which already lives at the southern edge of our region. These monsters grow much bigger than our channel and flathead cats. In 2005 Tim Pruitt pulled a 124-pound blue cat from the Mississippi River in Illinois.

So global warming has already begun taking its toll in many ways — some quick and dramatic, like the 2005 hurricanes, and some more subtle, like the dying off of polar bears. Many destructive processes are probably well underway that won't become obvious for years.

Meanwhile we'll just keep burning those fossil fuels as if we didn't have a choice and waiting for governments to do something about it. And waiting... And burning...

Perhaps those blackbirds, vultures and polar bears are trying to deliver us a subtle message — perhaps too subtle. Maybe we're waiting for a smack on the side of the head from an Osage orange.

WET BLANKET ON WRDA

River biologists were pretty excited last fall when it looked like Congress would pass the Water Re-

sources Development Act, which included funding to expand locks on the Upper Mississippi River and for a slew of river environmental programs. It didn't pass, but now hopes are rising again that the new Congress may pass it this spring.

While I understand that WRDA would make some improvements on the river's ecosystem, I have problems with it.

It aims to make improvements on

If shipping and fishing are going to coexist on the river, we need to look at the big picture.

about 15 percent of the upper river over a 50-year period. While many see the glass as 15 percent full, I guess I must be a pessimist, because I see it as 85 percent empty.

If shipping and fishing are going to coexist on the river, we need to look at the big picture, and change shipping so that it is not so destructive to the system, rather than trying to remodel the entire river to fit a shipping system that has changed little in the last 70 years. ♦



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Floating Cottages

A New Take on an Old Tradition

By Gary Kramer

Look — there, on the water. Is it a boat? A house? A houseboat? A boathouse? Yes, it's all of the above, and possibly the wave of the future for river marinas.

The newest attractions in waterfront living are mobile, floating, year-round homes built and licensed as boats, but designed to stay put. They are called by many names: floating homes, harbor cottages, cottage cruisers, aqua cabins. Available in a range of sizes, from 30 to 50 feet long and up to 15 feet wide, they can be used on private or leased land with a waterfront, although most are tying up in marinas.

So far, the buzz around these floating homes centers on the Great Lakes and the Illinois River. None have popped up yet on the Mississippi River, but that could change quickly. Marinas International, a marina management company, is selling floating homes in Port Clinton, Ohio, and elsewhere. This winter's Cleveland Boat Show was renamed the Boat and Waterfront Living Expo to include waterfront living options. One of the floating homes was on display.

Al Poser, vice president of Skipperliner in La Crosse, Wis., which manufactures a line of Cottage Cruisers, says the company is considering placing some in its South Bay Marina in La Crosse. He said the owner of a houseboat rental company nearby is looking at possible uses for the cottages.

IT'S A TRADITION

Living on the water is nothing new on the Mississippi. Houseboats are certainly popular and sometimes adapted for year-round living. (See "On the Boat Year Round," Big River, Jan-Feb 2005.)

People who depended on the river for their livelihood — fishers, trappers, clammers and hunters — had a tradition of living in floating shanty communities attached to shore with gang-planks and cables.

The only boathouse community still around is the one moored to Latsch Island across from Winona, Minn. Of course, these are

boathouses, without motors or steering. (See "Living in a Community of Floating Homes," Big River, May 1995.)

One of the reasons that boathouse communities disappeared on most of the river is that state and federal rules made it illegal to moor a boathouse in most places. However, rules that apply to boats are much more lenient.

In the new floating homes, the end that faces the water usually has an outside deck or porch that leads into a family room with a sleeper-sofa, entertainment center

People find these units attractive, because they are directly on the water, yet are less expensive than many condos with a river view.

(Photo above courtesy of Catamaran Cruisers.)

and fireplace. A kitchen with full-size appliances occupies the middle, and a bathroom and bedroom are in the rear. Cathedral ceilings and stairs lead to the second floor, which has loft-type sleeping areas on both ends. All cottages have some deck area and some have decks on top. They are fully insulated, heated, air-conditioned, and have sanitation systems that can be used year-round. Prices run from \$40,000 to almost \$190,000.

Skipperliner's Poser says they are slowly entering the market, carefully working with state departments of natural resources to make sure their units conform to all boating requirements. Skipperliner's floating cottages have engines, solid hulls and side steering in the front room, although, Poser explained, they are actually designed to stay put. Skipperliner is also designing a larger, one-level unit with two bedrooms and bathrooms on the first floor along with a dining room-game table area.

Harborside Marina, on the Des Plaines River (Illinois Waterway) west of Joliet, Ill., sells a stationary model with 399 square feet of living space that meets all the RV industry codes. It costs \$189,000 with a pontoon boat, or \$169,000 without the pontoon. More big developments of these units are being planned at several locations on the Illinois River.

Prices vary considerably. The Skipperliner models are semi-custom, which means buyers can choose from a number of options, with prices from \$100,000 to \$150,000. Catamaran Cruisers markets Aqua-Lodges in 12-by-35-foot or 12-by-42-foot versions, with prices starting under \$40,000, without an engine. Predicting the need for more affordable live-aboards, they are working on an Aqua-Cabin model at 8 by 30 feet, which can be pulled on a trailer.



Many floating cottages are built for four-season use. (Skipperliner)

FOLLOWING THE MARKET

Several factors seem to be driving the interest in floating homes. The biggest seems to be the age-old human desire to live near water. People find these units attractive, because they are directly on the water, yet are less expensive than many condos with a river view. They require little upkeep, no yard work and have lots of windows and great views, at least from the windows that face the river. They can be used in any season and, so far, they incur just sales taxes, but no property taxes.

Floating homes are being marketed as summer weekend homes, summer seasonal homes and as year-around second homes. People may want to live on the river during the warmer months but go south for the winter.

They appeal to boaters for some of the same reasons. Increasingly, marinas serve as weekend destinations rather than a place to keep your boat so you can take it out on weekends. Many boaters stay on their boats in the marina all weekend and use a smaller day boat to

Boats and Harbor Cottages share slips at Harborside Marina in Illinois. (Harborside Marina)





play in. The price of fuel is a major factor contributing to this shift.

Like others on the river, Gary Stirn, owner of Winegar Works Marina in Guttenberg, Iowa, has noticed the number of river travelers has diminished. "The number has been going down the last several years," he observed.

When boaters stay in their slips, marina owners sell less fuel and maintenance work. They can't make ends meet on slip rentals alone. Harbor cottages let marina owners collect rental fees, up to \$500 a month, 12 months a year. Restaurants, lounges, game rooms or other income-producing facilities might turn a marina into a year-round profit center.

No one is sure where all this is headed. Manufacturers and developers foresee villages of floating cottages in the backwaters, clustered in circles around central gazebos. There is talk about units that could cost \$300,000. And, sooner or later, city, county and state governments will reconsider their tax standing. 8 ♦



Gary Kramer is a boater and freelance writer who lives in Rock Island, Ill. His last article was "Judy Patsch, Nobody Recognizes Me without My Cookies," January-February 2007.

Top: Some floating cottages feature an optional helm on the front deck. (Catamaran Cruisers)

Left: Many floating cottages share marinas with traditional boats. (Skipperliner)

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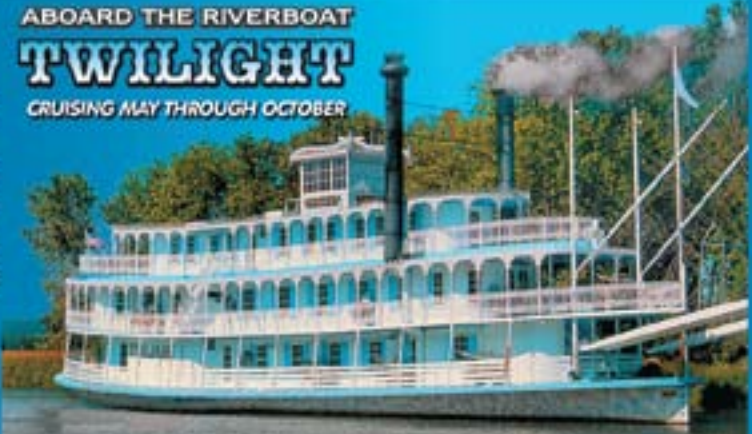




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Catfish Charlie's

Cozy Island Dining

Review and photographs by Becky Sisco

Any restaurant that's on an island, has a view of the river and is accessible by land and water is likely to attract the interest of hungry river lovers. A long menu that includes alligator, catfish and Cajun recipes just ups the ante.

Catfish Charlie's opened in May 2005 at American Marine in the Dubuque (Iowa) Yacht Basin, on City Island. Charlie Cretsinger, who has owned restaurants in the Midwest since 1991, partnered with Dave Pretasky, owner of the marina, to build the restaurant.

Cretsinger said that Dubuque, with its river and high bluffs, provided the perfect location. "I have always liked the river. I've been on lakes all over the world, but the river is very mysterious to me," Cretsinger said.

From outside, the restaurant is a delightful structure with nooks and crannies, and a cupola-like protrusion in the center of the roof that gives it a lighthouse effect.

With a limestone fireplace and oak woodwork, the inside offers a comfortable elegance that reflects the natural environment of Dubuque. The walls are colored a subdued sea-foam green. Floor-to-ceiling cathedral windows look onto a 3,500 square-foot deck and the river beyond. Although the view is a bit marred by several piles of salt, one can still feel the serenity of the water.

With two banquet rooms, the restaurant can serve 160, and another 130 on the deck outside.

I have eaten lunch at Catfish Charlie's several times with friends, and recently my husband and I went there for dinner.

As an appetizer, we chose the alligator nuggets, because neither of

us had tasted alligator before. The nuggets, cut from the tail, were firm yet tender, and tasty yet delicate. Dipped in a beer batter and fried to a golden brown, they had just a hint of sweetness. Order them to share, or you will be full before your entree arrives. Other appetizers include shrimp cocktail, onion rings, steamed mussels, spinach dip, Cajun catfish fingers and fried calamari.

The soup of the day, a white clam chowder, was flavorful and full of clams.

We found it tough to decide from the long list of entrees. Owner

"Everybody in Dubuque does a fish fry, but nobody serves as many different kinds of fish and seafood as we do."

Cretsinger rated the salmon balsamic and Texas-style dry-rubbed ribs as among his favorites. Altogether there are 21 entrees, including steaks, chicken, crab legs, and lobster, plus two nightly specials.

"Everybody in Dubuque does a fish fry, but nobody serves as many different kinds of fish and seafood as we do," he said. Catfish Charlie's does offer an all-you-can-eat Friday night fish fry.



My husband chose the catfish, which was coated with bread crumbs and deep fried. The coating turned out crispy without being greasy, and the fish was tender yet firm. He enjoyed the garlic mashed potatoes, which had enough garlic but didn't overpower the potatoes.

I ordered the Parmesan-encrusted pike. It was a bit on the dry side but still tender. Accompanying the fish were buttery Boston brown potatoes.

We enjoyed both dishes.

One of the things I appreciated most was the sautéed summer squash and zucchini that came with each entrée. Vegetables are a rare treat when dining casually in the Upper Midwest.

"I've always served a little bit of veggies on the side. It makes the plate look nice," Cretsinger said. "We cut all our vegetables here and sauté them in grape seed oil."

(Catfish Charlie's continues on page 36)

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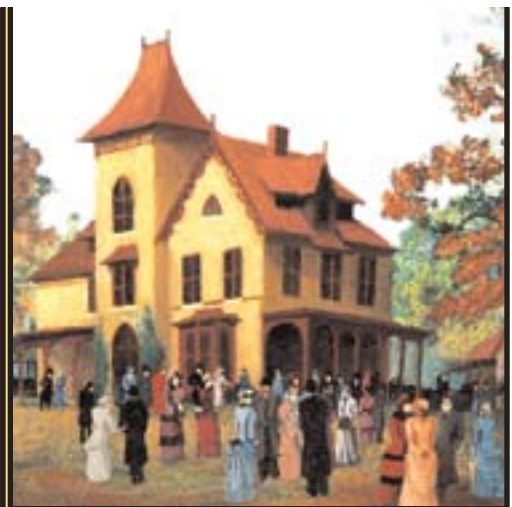
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Watch the Birds



Bald eagles

March is a good month to see eagles on the Upper Mississippi as they feast on fish around open waters and (some) fly north to nest. Visit Colvill Park on Hwy 61 south of **Red Wing, Minn.**, for **Eagle Spot** on Saturdays and Sundays through March 18. Volunteers will be on hand from 1 to 3 p.m. to answer questions, 800-498-3444.

The National Eagle Center in **Wabasha, Minn.**, will celebrate the peak of the eagle-watching season with **Soar with the Eagles** on March 9 through 11. There will be programs, speakers, tour boat excursions, kids activities and eagle counting from the Eagle Watch Deck. The deck is open Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 3 p.m., 877-332-4537.

Alma, Wis., just opened **Wings Over Alma Nature and Art Center**, with a 50-foot observation deck that looks out onto the river just below the Lock & Dam 4 spillway. Equipped with telescopes and binoculars, the deck is at 118 North Main St., (on Hwy 35 downtown) and open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day. It will feature events during Soar with the Eagles, 608-685-3303.

A four-hour guided **Eagle Nature Foundation, Ltd.**, coach tour will leave March 10 at 8 a.m. from the Stoney Creek Inn in **Galena, Ill.** The tour will visit several different communities of wintering bald eagles. Reservations, 815-594-2306, adults \$60.



Birding Festivals and Field Trips



Experience owls up-close at the **Festival of Owls** in **Houston, Minn.**, on March 2 to 4. Denver Holt, founder and president of the Owl Research Institute in Montana, will speak on snowy owls Friday night, 507-896-HOOT.

The Effigy Mounds National Monument, three miles north of **Marquette, Iowa**, is offering free **guided bird walks**. Celebrate Earth Day on April 22 with a hike at 10 a.m., and celebrate International Migratory Bird Day on May 12 with a hike at 8 a.m., 563-873-3491.

You'll find birding-related activities all around **Lake Pepin** in both Minnesota and Wisconsin at the **Great River Birding Festival** May 11 through 13. Events include bird banding and programs at both the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minn., and at Wings over Alma in Wisconsin, 877-525-3248.

The **La Crosse - Lansing Loop** is an all-day, three-state car caravan to see migrating waterfowl, raptors, and early passerines. Meet on March 17 at 7 a.m. at the entrance to Goose Island County Park off Hwy. 35 south of **La Crosse, Wis.**, 608-783-1149.

(Catfish Charlie's continued from page

As though we hadn't eaten enough, we decided to try the cheesecake. According to the dessert menu, "nobody makes a better cheesecake." It was true. The dessert was creamy and light — and the slice was large enough for three or four people. We selected an apple topping, which was liberally spiced with cinnamon and nutmeg.

My lunch companions and I have also tried the "Mississippi Bomb," a multi-layered piece of decadence with chocolate ganache, chocolate mousse and chocolate Grand Marnier-soaked cake. Actually, we have considered ordering just dessert for lunch because they are so good, but so far we have always ordered a normal lunch entrée first.

We especially liked the seafood primavera alfredo, the Philly wrap, the southwestern burger, seafood gumbo and goulash.

The prices at Catfish Charlie's

are reasonable. Most lunches cost \$7.95 or \$8.95, although a few run higher. Most dinners, which include soup or salad, vegetables, and potatoes or rice, range from \$14 to \$23. However, you will pay up to \$41 for the Alaskan king crab legs and \$43 for the lobster. The generously proportioned desserts are only \$4 or \$5.

Equally notable, the service is excellent and the wait staff is friendly. If you have to eat and run somewhere, they will make sure you're served in plenty of time.

The Dubuque Yacht Basin is off East 16th St. To get there, take Highway 151 & 61 and exit at the 16th St./Greyhound Park and Casino exit. The Yacht Basin is opposite the casino. ♦

Becky Sisco is a freelance writer who lives in Dubuque, Iowa. This is her first story for Big River.



Executive chef Steve Neese slices fresh vegetables to accompany the entrées at Catfish Charlie's.

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Freedom Park

Prescott, Wisconsin

By Pete Beurskens



A picnic shelter offers a view of the rivers. (John Benson)



Exhibits in the center tell the area's history. (Pete Beurskens)

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People have settled at the confluence of the Mississippi and the St. Croix Rivers for centuries. The new Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center at Freedom Park in Prescott, Wis., celebrates that and offers views of both rivers. From the center, high on a bluff overlooking the valley, one can see the clear water of the St. Croix merging with the muddy Mississippi.

"It is a good place to think about two kinds of rivers — a wild and scenic one and a hard working, damaged one that is a transportation and industrial resource," said Maureen Otwell, director of the center. "We need to think about this. As pressure increases, we will have to have a dialogue about what is ecologically sound and how the river works for us."

The park is the northern gateway to Wisconsin's Great River Road. Travelers who stop here will find pleasant facilities designed in harmony with their surroundings. The center features educational displays about the history, geology and life of the area; pavilions for picnics and shelter from the weather while viewing the river; and out-

door interpretive displays and viewing scopes. In addition, lovely bur oaks — true prairie oaks, resistant to fire — grace the site along with many other native plants, labeled with their poetical names: northern maidenhair fern, pussytoes, rough blazingstar, prairie smoke, pagoda dogwood, little bluestem, Jack in the pulpit.

Bird watching also brings visitors to the center.

"This is a superior site" for observing birds, said Sandra Hudson, staff naturalist, "with an unimpeded view of eagle roosting sites. During the fall migration, you can see just about any bird you can think of — flocks of robins, other songbirds, raptors, and waterfowl."

Visitors can also see egrets, pelicans, geese, mergansers, sharp-shinned hawks, goldeneyes, red-tailed hawks, ospreys, and great blue herons. "The location is a funnel for migrating birds following the two rivers."

Don't let bad weather keep you away. An outside microphone lets visitors inside the center hear birds as well as the clamor of passing geese, the whooshing of the wind, and the whistle and clatter of the

trains below — sounds that evoke the idea of two kinds of rivers.

The new center opened in May 2006. Freedom Park was named at its dedication in 1981, when the University of Minnesota Raptor Center released the park's namesake, an eagle named "Freedom." Artist Ed Beerly did a painting of the event, which is displayed in the center.

The park and center will also host a variety of events year round. Until the new website is up and running, call 715-262-0104 for a schedule of events and programs. ♦

Directions

Prescott is in Pierce County, 35 miles from the Twin Cities. Take Hwy 35 to the south end of Prescott at Monroe Street.

Facilities

Picnic area, playground, visitor center.

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- Confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers;
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