

Where Two Rivers Run Side by Side Red Wing to Hastings, Minn.

By Reggie McLeod

Red Wing's tree-lined Levee Park is one of the great river parks. The river and Trenton Island look great from the park, and the park and well-cared-for buildings of downtown look great from the river. These 19th-century brick buildings house a variety of stores and restaurants, including several notable landmarks, such as the St. James Hotel and the Sheldon Theater. Just upstream from downtown are two marinas between the shore and Bay Point Park, with even better views of the river and downtown. Upstream from downtown, the Pottery Place houses a variety of shops in a historic pottery factory.

There is plenty to do outdoors in Red Wing (pop. 16,116). Hike up 340-foot Barn Bluff from the trail at E. Fifth Street, or follow Memorial Drive to the top of Sorin's Bluff in Memorial Park for a sunset view and trail hiking, or climb Coon Hill in the Billings Tomfohr Conservation Area. Bike, skate or walk the 19.7-mile Cannon Valley Trail, which runs along the Cannon River to Cannon Falls. You'll need a "wheel pass" if you're on wheels between April 1 and November 1, and you're over 18.

If the weather is daunting, it's easy to lose track of time at the Goodhue County Historical Museum. It's a little hard to find, but it's worth the effort. Just follow West Seventh Street upriver from downtown until it becomes



Above: Just north of Lock and Dam 3, Treasure Island Marina rents temporary and permanent boat slips.

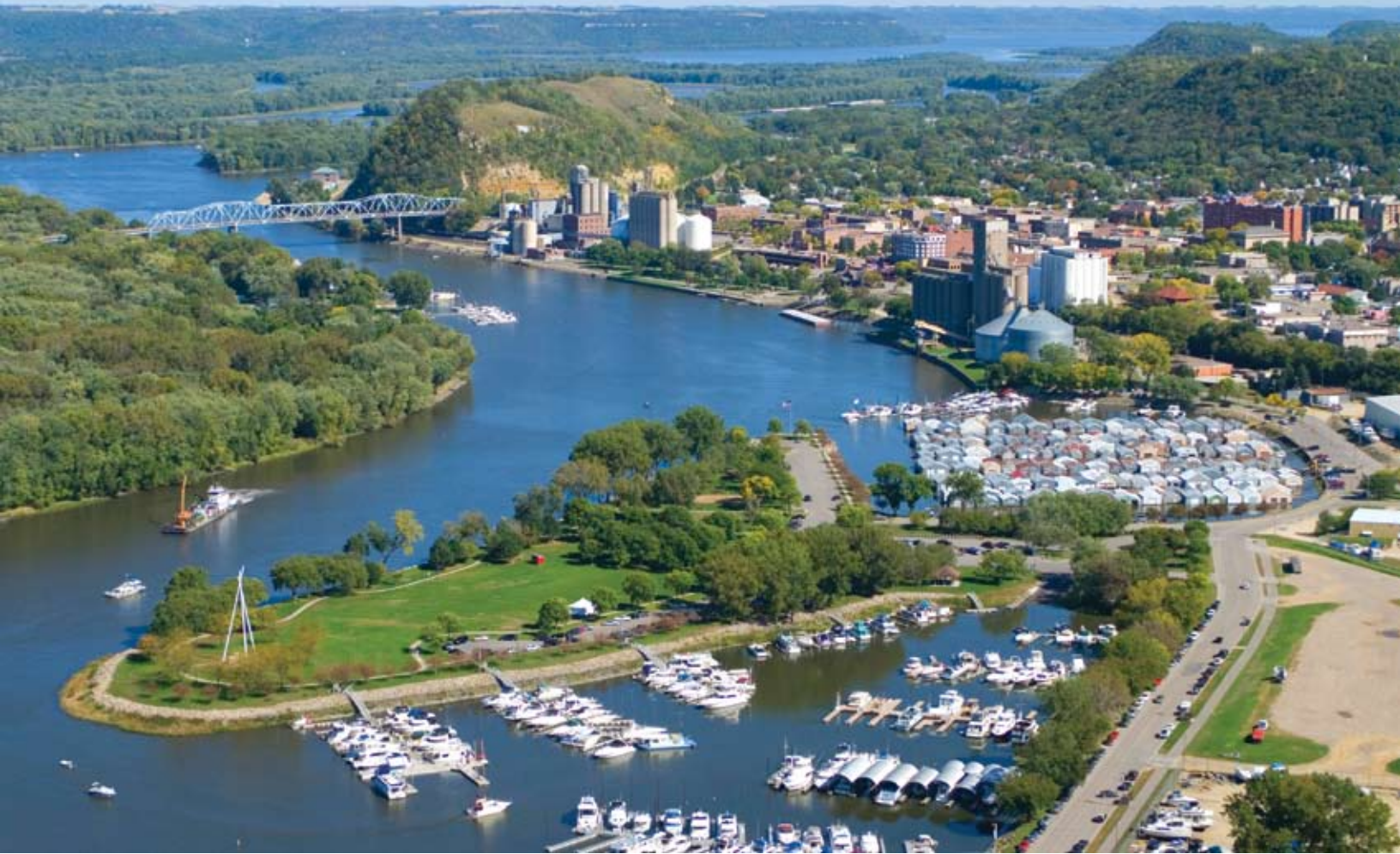
Right: The Spirit of the Water offers lunch and dinner cruises. (both Treasure Island Resort & Casino)



College Avenue, then just before it ends, turn right on Oak St. The museum includes many interesting exhibits, but its strong suits are a dazzling collection of Red Wing pottery and plenty of well-presented information about the history of Native Americans in the area, prehistoric as well as recent. Not too long ago Red Wing was home to a large Indian community. The city and surrounding area is nearly covered with important archaeological sites.

The museum includes a lot of infor-

mation about the Prairie Island Indian Community. It has an interesting history, in that these Dakota people returned to the area after the brutal removals of the 1850s and 60s, and managed to re-establish their community on a portion of their traditional lands, an island between the Mississippi and Vermillion rivers. They now operate a community center and Treasure Island Resort and Casino, which includes a marina, on the island. Their annual Pow Wow takes place on July 9, 10 and 11 this year.



The Mississippi makes a couple of big turns at Red Wing, Minn. (Jon Loyes)

The island also has a nuclear power plant. Lock and Dam 3 is at the lower tip of the island.

Two private groups own much of the bottomlands along both sides of the river between Prairie Island and downtown Red Wing. The first public access to the river upstream is at Prairie Island and a hard-to-find boat landing on the west side of the Vermillion River.

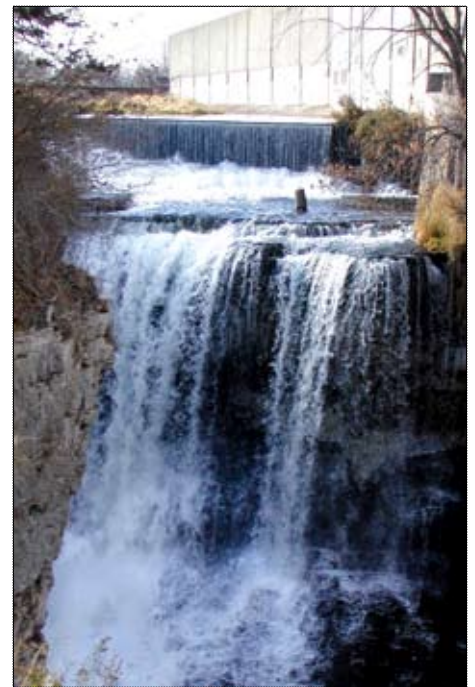
The Mississippi River's Main Channel generally swings back and forth from one side of the valley to the other, leaving backwaters and bottomland forests inside the curves. Just upstream of Red Wing, the Main Channel swings across the valley to follow the steep bluffs of the Wisconsin bank to Prescott, Wis. As a result, about 16 miles of backwaters and bottomland forest fill the Minnesota side of the valley between the Vermillion and Mississippi rivers in this stretch.

Ravenna Trail follows the Vermil-

lion River from Prairie Island to Hastings, with a couple of small landings providing access to the river. The Vermillion River runs parallel to the Mississippi for most of the stretch, with a mile or two of shallow backwa-

About 16 miles of backwaters and bottomland forest fill the Minnesota side of the valley between the Vermillion and Mississippi rivers.

ter lakes and channels — Gores Pool Wildlife Management Area — separating the two. The Vermillion and these backwaters are popular with paddlers and birdwatchers. The backwaters have been slowly filling in, largely with soil carried into the Mississippi River by the Minnesota River



Vermillion Falls on the south side of Hastings, Minn., is a hidden gem that is worth seeking out. (William Wesen, Wiki Commons)



Above: A short walk at the Freedom Center in Prescott, Wis., takes you to an overlook on the Mississippi River.

Right: Exhibits at the Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center in Prescott attract curious visitors. (both Margaret Smith)



upstream in the Twin Cities. Environmental groups in Red Wing and Hastings are working to clean up the Minnesota River to protect these backwaters and Lake Pepin, which begins downstream from Red Wing.

At Hastings the Vermillion River tumbles over a scenic rocky waterfall in a narrow gorge in Vermillion Falls Park, on the south side of town by the grain elevators.

Much of Hastings (pop. 21,661) was built in the 19th century, and it presents another fine example of a downtown from that era that's still an active retail center. A park lines the riverfront downtown near the interesting Canadian Pacific Railroad lift bridge with its monstrous concrete counterweights. A trail extends under the Highway 61 Bridge and upriver

Sometimes from the park you can see the creamy brown waters of the Mississippi on the far side and the dark blue waters of the St. Croix on the near side of the channel.



A trail extends under the Highway 61 bridge at Hastings. Work on a replacement bridge is scheduled to begin this fall. The old bridge will remain open until the new bridge is finished. (Chuck Kochmann, National Scenic Byways Online)

to Lock and Dam 3. Architecture and history buffs will want to visit Hastings City Hall downtown and Le Duc House south of downtown.

Construction of a new Highway 61 bridge is scheduled to begin next fall, but the old bridge will remain open until the new one is completed in three or four years, according to the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Marinas on both sides of the river keep it abuzz in the summer months. A couple miles downriver, the St. Croix River joins the Mississippi at Prescott, Wis. A long peninsula park along the highway has a beach on the St. Croix River side. The highway and railroad lift bridges cross the St. Croix side by side at the point where it flows into the Mississippi at the center of downtown Prescott (pop. 4,006). The lift bridges are necessary because the lower St. Croix is open to com-



Sea Wing Park in Diamond Bluff offers a relaxing place to swim, picnic and watch the river. (Reggie McLeod)

mercial traffic. Highway 35, Prescott's main street, parallels the St. Croix upstream and the Mississippi downstream, and many of the downtown buildings have a river view. Overlooking the confluence of two popular rivers brings many boaters to town in the summer.

Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center has a Hastings address, and

The park is named after the Sea Wing, an excursion boat that departed from Diamond Bluff on July 13, 1890, before a sudden storm capsized it on Lake Pepin, killing 98 passengers.

land on both sides of the St. Croix River. There's no fee to explore its tall pines, prairie, woods and orchard via 10 miles of hiking trails.

Freedom Park and the Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center, on the downstream end of town, overlooks the mingling waters of the two rivers. Sometimes from the park you can see the creamy brown waters of the Mississippi on the far side and the dark blue waters of the St. Croix on the near side of the channel. Infor-

mative interpretive signs at the center provide many interesting facts and river lore.

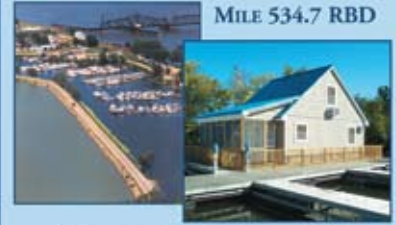
On the drive down the Wisconsin side of the river you won't see much of the river unless you leave Highway 35. Diamond Bluff (pop. 479) is a quiet, small town stretched out along the river. A boat ramp and the new Sea Wing Park, a few blocks upriver, offer access to the water. The park has a small beach and two small peninsulas jutting into the river, as well as picnic tables near the water and on a small bluff overlooking the river. The park is named after the *Sea Wing*, an excursion boat that departed from Diamond Bluff on July 13, 1890, before a sudden storm capsized it on Lake Pepin, killing 98 passengers.

There are no parks and not much access to the river between Diamond Bluff and Hager City, with the exception of a resort at Trenton. However, Highway 63 back to Red Wing passes several marinas, boat ramps, and restaurant and bars as it crosses Trenton Island, which also has a beach, marina and private campground.

The bridge takes you across the channel beneath picturesque Barn Bluff into downtown Red Wing. During the Studio Ramble, in September, artists on both sides of the river open their studios to visitors. 🏡



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