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May-June 2007

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From the Riverbank

Reggie McLeod
Editor/Publisher

NUDITY, BIG FISH AND SECRET SPOTS

There aren't really any secret places on the river, but there are many out-of-the-way places where you will encounter few, if any, people. In our new "River Places" column, we will visit some of those places. We feel confident that our readers appreciate places like New Albin's Army Road enough to take care of them and respect the wildlife and other people who use them.

I can't talk or write about places like this without recalling Yogi Berra's insightful observation, "Nobody goes to Coney Island anymore. It's too crowded."

So, please keep the dog on the leash and don't throw any noisy beer parties.

The story about bank fishing will also take you to some out-of-the-way places. My method for finding the hot bank-fishing spots is to look for clusters of those little styrofoam bait cups. I keep a couple of plastic shopping bags with my tackle, so I can clean up the spot before I leave. That way I keep the river clean and conceal the spot from the next wandering angler.

And, speaking of out-of-the-way places, we have noticed over the years that our readers have a particular fondness for stories that include human nudity or giant animals. So our readers should be happy to find both topics in our River News in this issue.

However, last issue's traditional April spoof "Too Much Nature?" did not provoke much response, in spite of the nudity and numerous clues that I am too embarrassed to point out. The real news is often so strange that we apparently need to go to greater extremes with our April efforts. I will remember that next year.

My mention of Kentucky coffee trees in the March-April issue did provoke several responses from readers who were quick to tell me where I could find quite a few of the trees growing in Minnesota, despite my claim that they had not crossed the border from Iowa. While I appreciate their help, I should point out that in all of the cases but one, the trees had been planted either in town or in an arboretum. I am looking forward to a hike this summer near the Root River — in Minnesota, not too far from the Iowa line — to visit a natural grove of Kentucky coffee trees. If it is late enough in the season, I'll collect some seeds, make some Kentucky coffee and report the results in this column.

It's always especially difficult to work on the May-June magazine, because the feature stories set me off to daydreaming about my summer plans. Every summer I try to do some new things on the river and visit some new places. Maybe I'll see you there. ☘

Big River™

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River News

Look Both Ways

Are fish bothered by heavy towboat traffic and, if so, which fish and what do they do about it? Recent research on the Upper Mississippi River, published in the *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, Nov. 2006, showed that gizzard shad and freshwater drum, both abundant in the river, and shovelnose sturgeon and flathead catfish, which are less common, were apparently not affected by the traffic. On the other hand, the number of redhorse, buffalo fish, channel catfish, sauger and white bass decreased as the traffic in the channel increased.

The research paper, "Persistent Disturbance by Commercial Navigation Alters the Relative Abundance of Channel-Dwelling Fishes in a Large River," by Gutreter, Vallazza and Knights, suggested three ways that heavy traffic could disturb fish. First, fish temporarily move away from the turbulence and noise, like channel catfish do. Second, fish get killed or injured by towboat propellers. Third, heavy traffic might cause fish to abandon otherwise good habitat.

The paper also suggested that altering the channels and side channels might offset some of the problems. For example, the research found more species and greater numbers of fish in the large secondary channels, so rehabilitation of clogged side channels or creation of new ones in stretches of the river where there aren't any would benefit some fish populations.

Limiting Atrazine

St. Paul — Three bills to tighten regulation of the herbicide atrazine were introduced in the Minnesota House and Senate this spring. Atrazine is used most often in cornfields. It is one of the most heavily used herbicides in Minnesota and is frequently found in the state's groundwater.

One bill would require the Minnesota Department of Health to review recent scientific findings about all

pesticides registered in the state, including atrazine, to see if any should be restricted or banned. Another bill would align Minnesota's maximum allowable concentrations of atrazine in drinking water with federal regulations. Currently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency limits atrazine to three parts per billion, while Minnesota allows 20 parts per billion. The difference is due to the fact that the Minnesota Department of Health does not account for the carcinogenic potential of atrazine.

Although atrazine has not been determined to cause cancer, it is a known endocrine system disruptor. University of California-Berkeley researcher Tyrone Hayes (see *Big River* March-April 2007) has linked the pesticide to the frog deformities widely found in Minnesota and elsewhere across the country. Hayes says the presence of endocrine disruptors in the groundwater also has implications for human health and fetal development. The EPA is still researching whether atrazine in drinking water affects hormone activity. Endocrine glands and hormones regulate growth, mood, development, sexual function and reproductive processes.

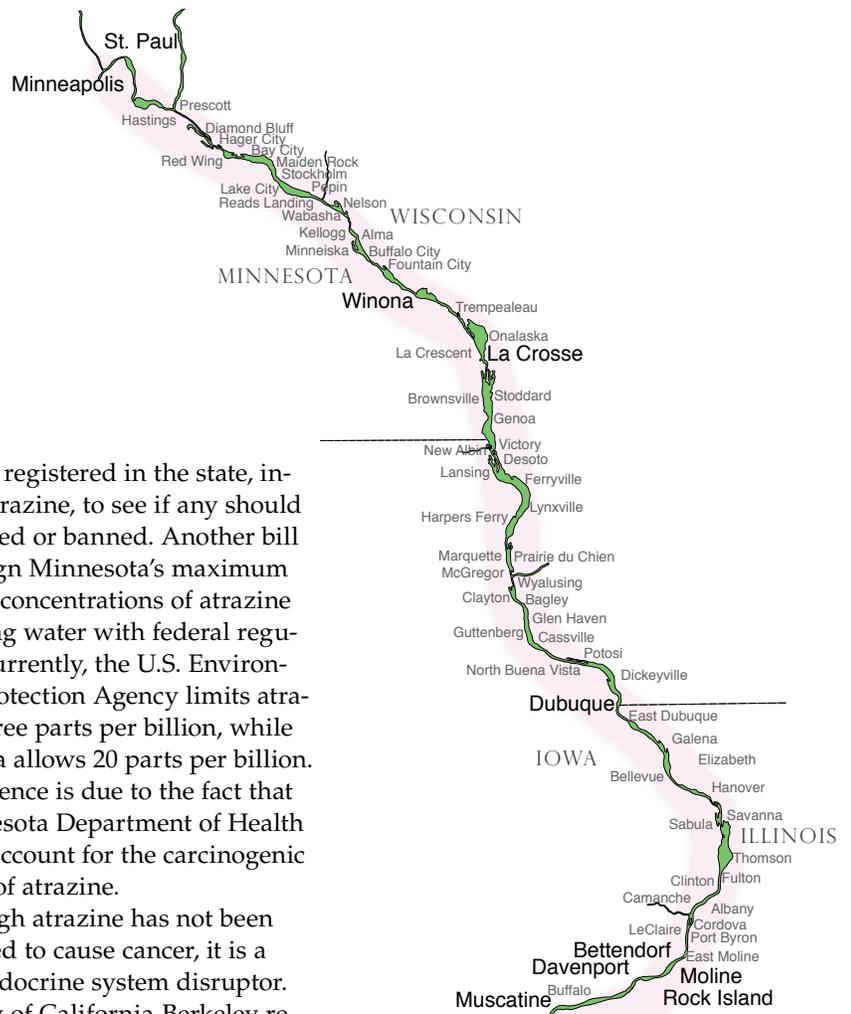
Two years ago, a bill to ban atrazine failed in the Minnesota Senate.

In Wisconsin, atrazine is prohibited on 102 areas covering about 1.2 million acres.

In Illinois, research by University of Chicago economist Don Coursey determined that banning the pesticide would cost Illinois farmers 161 to 577 million dollars the first year.

Cicada Summer

Residents, entrepreneurs and public agencies in eastern Iowa and northern



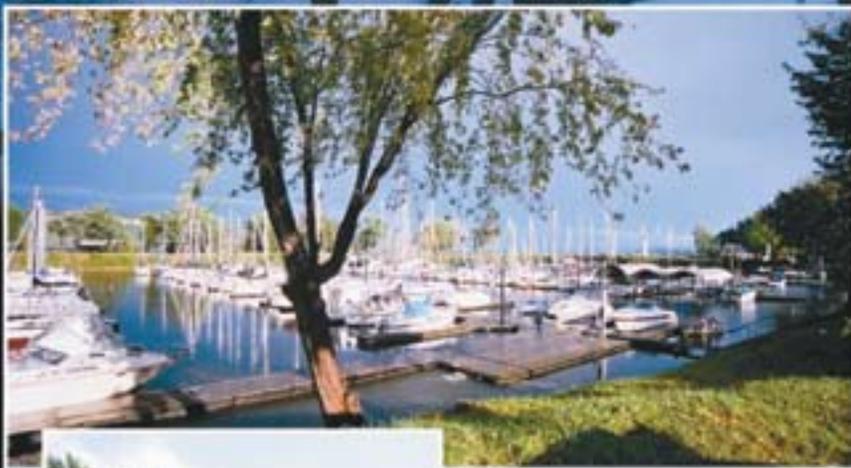
Illinois are preparing for a massive emergence of 17-year cicadas in May and June. Unlike the annual cicadas that come out to sing every summer, these periodic cicadas emerge only every 17 years, usually all at once and in greater numbers. Some areas may see as many as 1.5 million cicadas per acre.

The Ravinia music festival in Highland Park, near Chicago, changed its performance dates from June to July to avoid competing with the cicadas' loud buzzing, which goes on all day.

The state of Illinois is sending a "Cicada Mobile" to schools, festivals and farmers markets to educate people about the bugs, which don't sting or bite or devour crops like the locusts people sometimes mistake them for, although the 17-year cicadas do make people anxious, perhaps because of their big red eyes.

According to Dr. Donald Lewis, Iowa State University entomologist,

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cicada males sing by using strong muscles to “vibrate two shell-like drums on the sides of the abdomen. The resulting high-pitched, rapid clicks resonate through air sacs and other structures to control sound volume and quality. The upward angles of the wings form a megaphone-like chamber that further controls the sound.”

As soon as ground temperatures rise to a consistent 64 degrees, the cicadas tunnel out of the ground, shed their skins and fly up into the trees, where they begin a period of eating, singing, mating and laying eggs. Then adults die, the eggs hatch and the young eat and drop to the ground, where they dig tunnels and crawl underground for 17 years, living on the sap of tree roots and slowly growing to maturity. The 17-year cicada is one of the longest-lived insects in the world. Only about 118 of these big hatches have occurred since the year 1 A.D.

Get more information and compare songs of various cicadas, at the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, Insect Division website. 🐛

Barge User Fees

Washington, D.C. — The Bush Administration is likely to ask Congress to impose fees on commercial users of the inland and intracoastal waterway system, in addition to the current tax of 20 cents a gallon on tow diesel fuel.

In a February press conference, John Woodley, assistant secretary of the Army and overseer of the Army Corps of Engineers, explained, “The existing fuel tax covers only about 10 percent of the total costs that the Corps incurs to make barge transportation possible on the inland waterways system. The proposed fee would promote the efficient use of the nation’s overall resources and require the commercial interests that benefit from federal capital investments on the waterways to carry more of the costs.”

The funds collected would be used

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for waterway construction and rehabilitation projects. (*Waterways Journal*, 2-12-07)

A Fishy Dilemma

Vicksburg, Miss. — Weldon Fortner didn’t have long to make up his mind between what was possibly the biggest fish he’d ever snagged, which was slowly pulling his boat away from a piling, and the spouse who had been yanked out of the boat

“I looked up at her and I looked at the rod, and this is what I said, ‘I can always get another wife, but I may never get another fish like this,’” Fortner recalled. “That probably wasn’t the smartest thing I’ve ever said.”

while trying to cast off. While she dangled from a rope on the piling, he considered his options.

“I looked up at her and I looked at the rod, and this is what I said, ‘I can always get another wife, but I may never get another fish like this,’” Fortner recalled. “That probably wasn’t the smartest thing I’ve ever said.”

Then he turned the boat around to get her before they both took off to get the fish.

Lisa Fortner said she never doubted her husband, but she wasn’t going to let him forget his comment very quickly, either, especially after she found out she’d been dangling over 45 feet of water.

The Fortners caught an 85-pound blue catfish and kept it in a nearby pond for a few days before they found an aquarium large enough to handle it. The big blue’s new home is a 150,000-gallon aquarium at the Bass Pro Shops in Springfield, Mo. (*Clarion-Ledger*, 3-18-07)

Measure for Measure

La Crosse, Wis. —The Wisconsin and Minnesota departments of natural resources received a million-dollar grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to develop accurate, consistent ways to evaluate the



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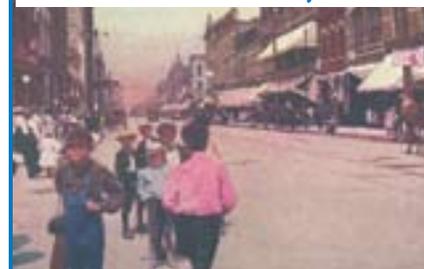
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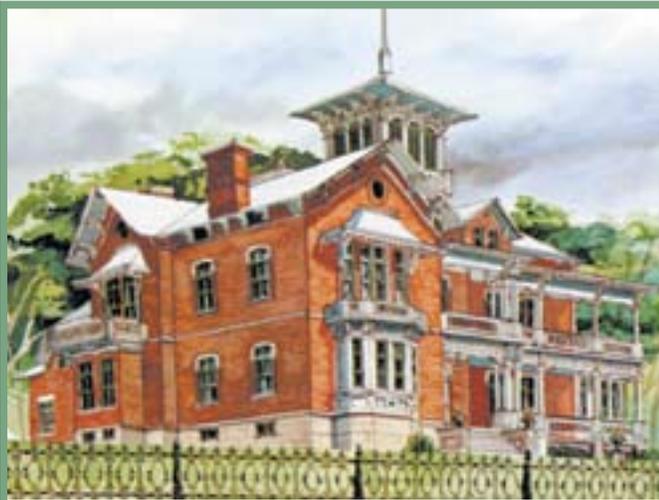
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Photo Contest Winner



Leo M. Kearns took this picture of the fish market in Lansing, Iowa, in June 2000 during flood stage on the Mississippi. The building has since burned.

Send entries for the July-August issue contest to *Big River* by May 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. 🌊

health of the Upper Mississippi River and two other rivers, the Ohio and Missouri. It will also allow the EPA and the states to see how well they've met the federal Clean Water Act goal of protecting and restoring all waters for fish, fishing, vegetation and recreation.

The funds will help create standard measurements. Currently, state and federal agencies use different methods to monitor and measure river conditions.

The project will also analyze and evaluate new categories of information collected from 2004 through 2006, including concentrations of pesticides and heavy metals in fish; fish genetics; and information about microscopic water plants and animals. The two agencies will also return to specific sites along the river to collect more detailed data about a few biological indicators, such as underwater vegetation.

Riverbottoms Protected

One hundred fifty-eight acres of bluffs and river bottomland where the Zumbro River enters the Mississippi, near Kellogg, Minn., was recently purchased by the Trust for Public Land and transferred to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The land links two units of the Richard J. Dorer State Forest and creates 4,000 acres of contiguous public land, as well as the largest contiguous block of floodplain forest in the region.

The woods and marshes along the river provide critical habitat for many species of wildlife and fish. The land, which includes nine miles of riverfront, will be open to the public for hiking, hunting and fishing. The wide, sandy river is popular with canoeists.

The DNR plans to restore native trees and other native vegetation, thereby reducing stream bank erosion and reducing the amount of sediment that flows into the Mississippi River.

The 1,235 acres recently purchased

by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation in northeastern Iowa, near Waukon, includes more than three miles of shoreline along the Upper Iowa River. The new land provides canoe access to the river, as well as spectacular overlooks and rich habitat for wildlife. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources hopes to take over the land and manage it together with a contiguous 625-acre Pine Creek Wildlife Management Area.

Urban Coyotes

Red Wing, Minn. — Coyotes roamed the Upper Mississippi River Valley long before there were urban areas, but they're becoming just as adept at making a living among people as raccoons, white-tail deer and Canada geese. There are probably more of these quick, quiet, well-camouflaged animals in urban areas than anyone imagines.

Red Wing recently decided to trap and kill from 10 to 20 coyotes frequenting a residential area, after one

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of them threatened a puppy standing a few feet from its owner in a backyard. The owner feared for the safety of his small children.

Bloomington, a Twin Cities suburb, received more than 100 requests for help with coyotes in 2006.

Dubuque, Iowa, launched a public education program in response to increasing sightings of the canny canids.

Encounters with coyotes are being reported more often as cities spread out and as coyotes get more accustomed to people.

In a study of coyotes in urban Chicago, now in its sixth year, Stanley Gehrt, assistant professor of natural resources at Ohio State University, found that they are more active at night; they live longer than rural coyotes, partly because they aren't hunted in cities; and there may be as many as 2,000 of them in the city limits.

Back Off?

Madison, Wis. — Airboats are noisy boats with some loud supporters and opponents.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is considering whether to exempt trappers from a proposed new airboat noise testing law. The Wisconsin legislature requested the exemption. Rescue and law enforcement personnel are already exempt.

Currently Wisconsin law requires that boat noise not exceed 86 decibels, but airboat noise is tested at 300 feet, while outboard motors are tested at 40 inches. At hearings last summer, citizens complained that airboat noise should be tested at the same distance as standard outboard motors. Following the hearings, the DNR recommended changing its testing distance to 100 feet.

"The number of airboats is very small and we don't get a lot of complaints about airboat noise, maybe because they are used more in the fall when recreational uses are down," said Roy Zellmer, Wisconsin DNR boating law administrator. The number of airboats and hovercraft licensed in Wisconsin (550) has remained about the same for more than 30 years.

It is illegal to sell airboats in Wisconsin and Minnesota, but it's not illegal to operate them.

Repatriated Carp

Macomb, Ill. — Big River Fish Corp., based in Pearl, Ill., one of the largest producers of smoked and dried fish in the United States, may soon be shipping fresh and frozen Asian carp back to Asia — to China, to be specific. The company has been marketing the invasive species for the past four years and in 2005 sold more than 2 million pounds of it. A recent trade trip to China found even more buyers.

Schafer's Fish Market, in Fulton, Ill., already sells more than 2 million pounds of Asian carp to Asian-American communities in large cities across the United States and also plans to market the meaty fish to China.

Four of the five invasive carp species commonly called Asian carp were imported from the rivers of eastern China.

Ballast Battles

Detroit — Late in 2006, the Michigan legislature passed a law that requires international ships docking at Michigan ports to keep their ballast water onboard or treat it by a state-approved method before discharging it. The law is an attempt to stop international ships from discharging invasive species along with their ballast water into the Great Lakes. Invasive species such as zebra mussels and round gobies have caused millions of dollars of damage to the lakes and the Mississippi River watershed.

Now it appears the law will be challenged on several legal fronts. If Congress ratifies the proposed United Nations International Maritime Organization's ballast water treaty, it would trump Michigan's law. Another law, called the Commerce Clause, permits the federal government to preempt a valid state law if it interferes with commerce among states, tribes or foreign nations. Since many ships would have to retrofit existing equipment, they might claim Michigan's law damages international trade. (*Seiche*, February 2007)

The newest invasive species to be deposited in the Great Lakes by way of international ships' ballast water is a little shrimp, *Hemimysis anomala*. The half-inch creature is native to rivers in the Ponto-Caspian region of Eastern Europe, also home to zebra mussels. Unlike the deep-water shrimps that are native to the Great Lakes, these shrimp inhabit shallow areas and shorelines.

Scientists predict the shrimp will be a disruptive force. It is a voracious eater of microscopic animals at the bottom of the food chain and will compete with young fish, although it might also be food for larger fish. The new shrimp was first spotted at Muskegon, Mich., last November.

More Quad Cities Trails

Quad Cities — Bicycle and pedestrian trails are a source of pride in the Quad Cities, yet new trail plans are still sprouting.

Bettendorf, Iowa, plans to build a riverfront path from the I-74 bridge to Duck Creek next fall.

Buffalo, Iowa, is in the engineering phase of its own riverfront trail.

The Quad Cities Riverway Trail, consisting of more than 65 miles of trails on both sides of the river, may be extended 16 miles, from Bettendorf through LeClaire and Princeton.

Not wanting to be left out of the loop, literally, Moline, Ill., proposes using existing green space to build a trail connecting the Rock River, Mississippi River and downtown with South Park, the site of potential redevelopment.

River Action, an environmental, nonprofit organization, continues to play a key role encouraging, planning and finding funds for many trails.

RAGBRAI on the River

Bellevue, Iowa — Bike riders in the RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa) will find themselves in Bellevue at the end of the ride on July 28, seven days after setting off from Rock Rapids. This year's 478-mile route is the flattest of any ride so far. Lance Armstrong and team plan to participate again this year.

Dry Dock News

After raising more than \$750,000 to move a 66-ton antique steam paddle-wheeler and restore it offsite while building a 35-foot high permanent shelter for it on the grounds of the Buffalo Bill Museum, in LeClaire, Iowa, museum curators were told that the boat is too fragile to move.

The *Lone Star*, a 138-year-old river boat that retired 40 years ago, has been severely weakened by dry rot. The experts' best advice now is to excavate and pour a concrete base underneath it, much like digging a basement under an existing house. The process was scheduled to begin in April.

A "boat" that never floated, the *Juilius C. Wilkie*, is a paddlewheel steamboat replica that sits on a concrete pad in a shallow pool of water in Levee Park, in Winona, Minn. It was built to replace a real riverboat that burned to the ground in 1981. Over the years the *Wilkie* always seemed to cost more in upkeep than it brought in from rental to wedding parties and organizations. A new group of volunteers recently gained control of the boat and began a new round of fundraising. Repairs are scheduled to begin this spring.

Thirsty Fertilizer Plant

East Dubuque, Ill. — Rentech Energy Midwest Corp. of East Dubuque said it will use local resources — including Illinois coal and possibly water from the Mississippi River — when it starts running its fertilizer plant on gasified coal rather than natural gas. Rentech Energy is one of the nation's largest producers of ammonia fertilizer. Gasification is a thermochemical process that breaks coal into its chemical constituents. The U.S. Department of Energy calls it one of the best ways to convert coal into electricity, hydrogen and other energy products.

The plant now uses about 2,000 gallons of water per minute to produce its ammonia and other nitrogen products, but it will use more than twice that amount — up to 4,500 gallons per minute — once it begins to

(River News continues on page 48)

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Upcoming Events

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July 28, 2007
- Community Wide Garage Sales
August 4, 2007
- Fall Festival
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- Christmas Walk
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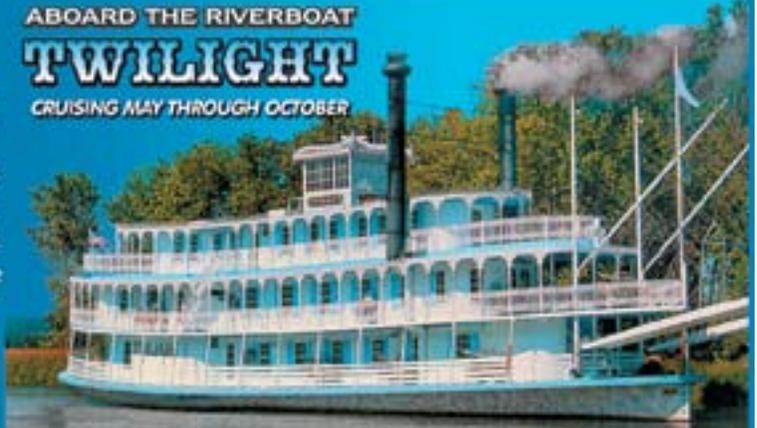
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River Shipping — Upstream is Up, and Downstream is Down

Less grain is traveling downriver on barges, probably because increasing ethanol production in the Midwest is consuming increasing quantities of corn. At the same time, cargo traveling upstream is increasing. In 1990 more than three times as much cargo travelled downstream in barges than travelled upstream through Lock 15, at Rock Island, Ill. However, during the last three shipping seasons downstream and upstream traffic was nearly equal.

Note the dip in traffic in 1993, when catastrophic flooding late in the summer shut down shipping.

Last year unprocessed grain made up 85 percent of the

cargo shipped downstream through Lock 15. Corn made up 82 percent of that grain. Animal feed and processed grains made up half of the cargo other than grain shipped downstream. Chemical fertilizers made up 13 percent, and iron ore and scrap metal made up 10 percent of the other.

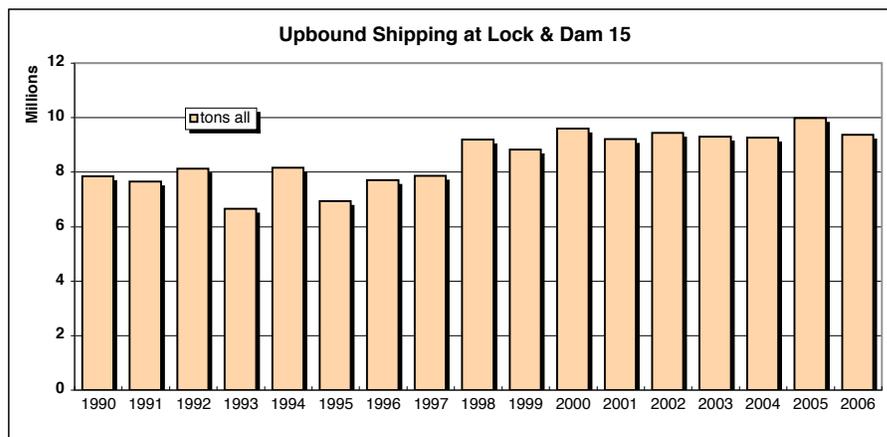
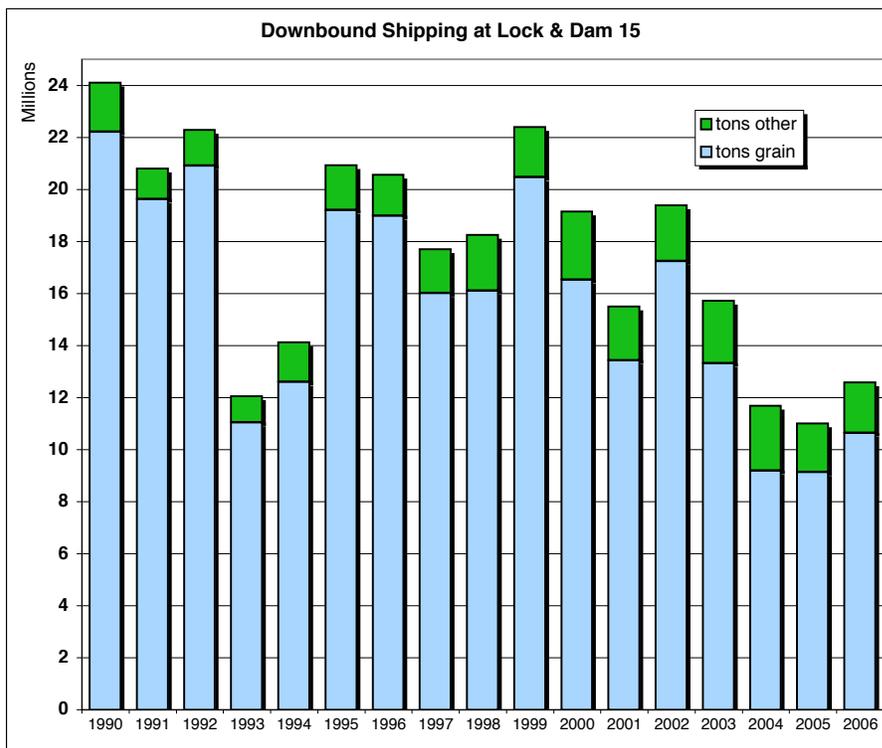
Most of the cargo shipped downstream, especially grain, is loaded on ships in New Orleans and exported.

Coal accounted for 40 percent of all cargo shipped upstream; sulphur, clay and salt made up 15 percent; and chemical fertilizers made up 12 percent. ☞

Information compiled by Mai Nakamura.

Downbound			
year	total tons	grain	others
1990	24,094,235	22,207,872	1,886,363
1991	20,808,592	19,624,170	1,184,422
1992	22,280,205	20,906,186	1,374,019
1993	12,054,867	11,035,992	1,018,875
1994	14,126,833	12,607,069	1,519,764
1995	20,920,301	19,203,900	1,716,401
1996	20,559,533	18,982,020	1,577,513
1997	17,690,831	16,011,616	1,679,215
1998	18,244,219	16,112,206	2,132,013
1999	22,388,342	20,468,358	1,919,984
2000	19,153,142	16,532,743	2,620,399
2001	15,500,736	13,420,295	2,080,441
2002	19,392,508	17,248,677	2,143,831
2003	15,721,840	13,308,958	2,412,882
2004	11,678,932	9,187,904	2,491,028
2005	11,006,014	9,131,090	1,874,924
2006	12,577,429	10,645,477	1,931,952

Upbound	
year	tons
1990	7,850,659
1991	7,662,810
1992	8,122,430
1993	6,660,305
1994	8,160,896
1995	6,941,203
1996	7,703,674
1997	7,868,623
1998	9,196,082
1999	8,821,418
2000	9,600,136
2001	9,207,995
2002	9,436,555
2003	9,297,366
2004	9,269,558
2005	9,984,993
2006	9,364,639

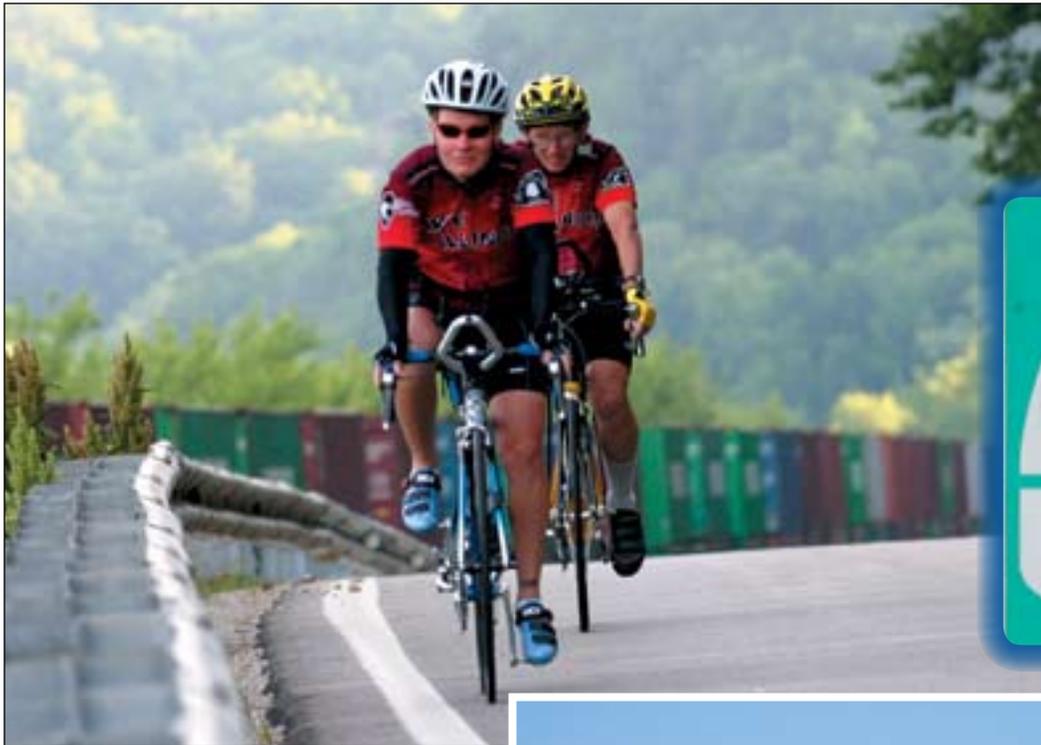




Biking the Mississippi River Trail

A 3,000-MILE ADVENTURE AND WORK IN PROGRESS

By Marc Hequet



Opposite and above: Riders pedal between Mississippi Palisades State Park and Savanna, Ill., during the 2006 Grand Illinois Trail and Bike Tour. (Aaron Steinmann)

Mark Ackelson marvels at the changes since he first biked along the Mississippi River through Iowa, north to south, in 1974. Some of the roads weren't paved yet, but it was a wonderful trip. People in riverside towns welcomed the 29-year-old, bought him dinner and beer, and helped him fix his bike.

The trek is easier now, in part because Ackelson and other river lovers have been working on the Mississippi River Trail, promoting a continuous route for bicycles and others near the river from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico.

"It's about getting people to the river and along the river and linking communities along the river," said Ackelson, now president of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and chairman of the nonprofit Mississippi River Trail Inc.

"People talk about it as a 3,000-mile route. It's really about linking community to community and people to the river."

Many areas have trails along the stream, but a continuous route the full length of the world-famous river gets international attention. "If



The MRT goes through open country as well as urban landscapes, such as this area in the Twin Cities. (© Explore Minnesota Tourism)

you just talked about linking a trail between Winona and Wabasha it doesn't quite have the same appeal as going from headwaters to Gulf."

Linking 400 communities in 123 counties and 10 states isn't easy. But believers are ready to do the hard work. The MRT doesn't own any trails or roads, but it works with groups, clubs and government agencies to improve and promote the trail. Maps of the trail in all 10 states are available on its website.

"What I love about it is the fact that I feel like I'm doing something that really is important for the American people," explained Terry Eastin, who works with Ackelson as executive director of Mississippi River Trail Inc. in Fayetteville, Ark. "Alternative forms of transportation are going to be critical in upcoming years. People who use bicycles are not burning fossil fuels, and they're healthier."

Trails "make the river a social asset," asserted Pat Nunnally, the for-



Bicyclists sometimes share a hilly, curvy trail with other vehicles, as on this stretch of Illinois Highway 84 between Mississippi Palisades State Park and Savanna, Ill. (Aaron Steinmann)

mer executive director. In many river communities, “putting a trail through is a relatively inexpensive and simple design solution to get more people down to the river,” he added.

Trails connect people to the river and prompt communities to think about their riverfronts, explained Nunnally, an urban planner who served as part-time executive with MRT from 2001 to 2005. He moved on because “the project outgrew me.” Eastin became MRT’s first full-time director.

Nunnally now coordinates the

University of Minnesota’s Mississippi River Initiative, which helps neighborhoods and communities revitalize their riverfronts.

Show Me a Sign

The Mississippi River Trail already exists, much of it along highway shoulders. About 65 percent of the trail is marked by MRT signs, which is important because following the trail isn’t as easy as following the riverbank. In Iowa, the trail wanders 10 miles inland. People who see the signs may be more likely to use the

trail, especially when they can also find maps to help them plan their outings.

A court decision in Illinois, however, placed a speed bump on the road to better signage for the Mississippi River Trail. Many Illinois local governments, spooked by a 1998 court decision, don’t want to put up signs designating bicycle routes.

When a bike’s front tire stuck between two planks on a one-lane bridge in Wayne Township, DuPage County, in 1992, the rider sued. He claimed that the township should

The trail starts in the lakes and forests of northern Minnesota and winds among the magnificent bluffs of Wisconsin and Illinois, past historic Galena and through industrial areas in the Quad Cities.

have put a sign on the bridge warning that it wasn’t safe. He lost and lost again on appeal.

The Illinois Supreme Court decision upheld for defendants, meaning local governments in Illinois cannot be held accountable for a bicyclist’s injury due to road conditions. The court, however, stated that local governments lose their immunity if some physical indication — such as signs — say that a route is intended for bicycle use.

This means that in Illinois — with 585 riverfront miles — local communities are wary of bike-trail signs, including signs for the for Mississippi River Trail.

“As soon as people hear about liability, they stop thinking about everything else,” sighed Ed Barsotti, executive director with the League of Illinois Bicyclists.

His group has published a guide to show bikers the way along the Mississippi. It’s a free 1.4 megabyte download at its website.

Making the Links

The trail starts in the lakes and forests of northern Minnesota and winds among the magnificent bluffs of Wis-

consin and Illinois, past historic Galena and through industrial areas in the Quad Cities. Some stretches in the river valley are flat, but northern Iowa, for example, has some steep hills. The trail usually follows both sides of the river.

At the Quad Cities, trail users can cross the river on a bridge or on the Channel Cat water taxi. The new I-74 bridge between Davenport, Iowa, and Moline, Ill., will include a path for walkers and bicyclists, according to Joe Taylor, president and CEO of the Quad Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"It is not a finite system. It will always continue to change as local communities develop riverfront trails," added MRT's Eastin.

When American Trails Inc. hosted the National Trails Symposium in Quad Cities in October 2006, Pam Gluck, executive director of the Redding, Calif., -based group, was impressed with the Mississippi River Trail. "Keep that big vision in mind in completing the whole trail," she



RiverWay kiosks inform riders along the MRT in the Quad Cities. Here, riders rest in Bettendorf, Iowa. (River Action)

advised, "and don't give up. Don't ever give up."

A national trail must accommodate a variety of users. Over-the-road bicyclists want to go at a pretty good clip, 18 or 20 miles per hour, but in some areas they share the trail with run-

ners, inline skaters, toddlers on training wheels, grandmas with strollers and big guys walking dachshunds.

The Iowa portion of the trail is mostly on-road, and trail backers want to move it off-road in stages.

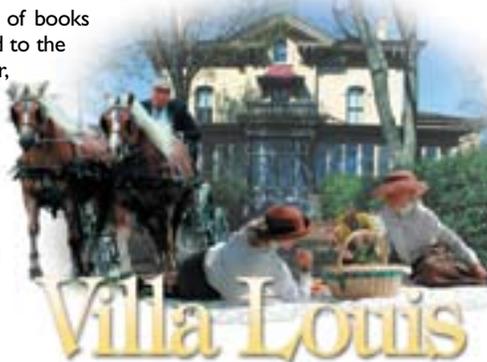
(MRT continues on page 41)

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- Minneapolis: Stone Arch Festival of the Arts, June 16-17
- Prescott Daze, Sept. 7-9
- Hastings Rivertown Days, July 20-22
- Bay City Daze, June 9
- Red Wing River City Days, Aug. 3-5
- Maiden Rock Summerfest, June 16
- Stockholm Art Fair, July 21
- Lake City Waterski Days, June 22-24
- Pepin Lighted Boat Parade, July 7
- Wabasha Riverboat Days, July 27-28
- Great River Birding & Nature Festival, Around Lake Pepin, May 11-13
- Kellogg Watermelon Fest, Sept. 6-9
- Alma Strawberry Festival, June 23-24
- Fountain City Old Time Farm Fest, Sept. 1-3
- Winona Steamboat Days, June 13-17
- Trempealeau Catfish Days, July 13-15
- Onalaska Sunfish Days, May 24-27
- La Crosse Riverfest, July 4-8

WISCONSIN

- Stoddard Fun Days, July 13-14
- New Albin Shooky Fink Little League Tourney, July 13-15
- Desoto Fish Fly Days, August 18-20
- Lansing Fish Days, Aug. 10-12
- Ferryville River Bluff Daze, July 28
- Driftless Area Art Festival, Soldiers Grove, Sept. 15-16
- Marquette Independence Day Celebration, July 7-8
- Prairie Dog Blues Festival, Prairie du Chien, July 27-28
- McGregor Arts & Crafts, May 26-28
- Bagley Fourth of July Celebration, July 4
- Guttenberg Stars and Stripes River Day, July 7
- Cassville Twin-O-Rama, July 21-22
- Potosi-Tennyson Catfish Festival, Aug. 10-12

IOWA

- America's River Festival, Dubuque, June 8-10
- Galena River Days, May 26-28
- Black Hawk War Commemoration, Apple River Fort, Elizabeth, June 23-24
- O-Galena! Orienteering Festival Hanover, Sept. 29-30
- Bellevue Heritage Days, June 30-July 1
- Savanna Riverfront Jazz Festival, June 22
- Thomson Melon Days, Sept. 1-3
- Clinton Riverboat Days, July 6-8
- Fulton Dutch Days, May 4-5
- Camanche Days, Aug. 9-12
- LeClaire, Iowa, & Port Byron, Ill., Great River Tugfest, Aug. 11-12
- Bettendorf Old Fashioned Fourth, July 4

ILLINOIS

- Mississippi Valley Bluesfest, Davenport, June 29-July 1
- Taste of the Quad Cities, Moline, June 22-23
- Gumbo Ya-Ya, Rock Island, June 8-9

Go to www.big-river.com for links to these festivals and more.

Festivals on the Upper Miss



Crowds gather at the riverfront at America's River Fest in Dubuque, Iowa. (Dubuque Convention & Visitors Bureau)

In small towns, big towns and in-between towns you'll find festivals all summer long up and down the river. From boats to blues and waterskis to watermelons, the choices will keep you busy.

Check out the latest in handmade items at an art fair, enjoy a catfish sandwich (or two). Want to see double? Cassville's Twin-O-Rama will be a delight.

Go to the Big River website for links to the festivals listed on the map. 🌊



You'll get the blues day and night at the Prairie Dog Blues Festival in Prairie du Chien, Wis. (Prairie du Chien Area Chamber of Commerce)



Rope pulls across the river stop boat traffic at the Great River Tugfest, between LeClaire, Iowa, and Port Byron, Ill. (Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau)



Dancers fill the street at Viva Quad Cities in Bettendorf, Iowa. (Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau)



Some sandbars and beaches are so popular you'll never have them to yourself unless you go during the week or in the fall. (Tisha Sandberg)

A Floating Adventure — Guide to Renting a Houseboat

By Becky Sisco

Harley Wildes had never spent much time on the river until the summer of 2004, when he, his wife, and some relatives and friends rented a houseboat.

"We woke up in the morning with the mist on the river and the eagles flying down around us," said the Waterloo, Iowa, man. On that and a subsequent trip, he and his companions saw pelicans, deer, coyote and the shells of recently hatched turtles.

"You kind of commune with nature," he said.

The group also partied and played.

"On the last trip we had a water slide," he said. "We would go up to the top of the boat, slide down in the water, swim around awhile and go back up. I guess we were being kids."

Houseboating can be great fun for both families and groups of friends. It can take you out of the hustle and bustle of every day life, make you feel like a kid again and show you some astounding scenery.

Many people are surprised by how clean, clear, and blue the river is, especially in the northern reaches of the Upper Mississippi, according to

Greg Stirn, who owns S & S Houseboat Rentals in Lansing, Iowa. "Some are amazed by how the river meanders with its islands, backwaters and beaches."

Others are fascinated by the locks and dams, along with the towboats and barges. "At night, the barges shine their spotlights on the sandbars, and that lights up the whole beach," said Huck Ehrlich, owner of Huck's Houseboat Vacations LLC in La Crosse, Wis.

Still others enjoy exploring the small towns that dot the riverbanks.



Groups often rent a boat for a weekend-long party. (Bob Myers)

Learning to dock the boat and fill up with gas are new adventures for many houseboat renters. (Tisha Sandberg)



"A lot of people have commented on the great family time they have had," Ehrlich said. "If you travel on a boat, you are forced to be together. I actually had some people who gave their kids a choice between coming

If you stay in the channel, which is marked by buoys, you won't run into a wingdam, just as you won't run into a culvert if you don't drive in the ditch."

back here and going to Disney World. They chose to come back here."

Several companies rent houseboats on the Upper Mississippi between Wabasha, Minn., and Guttenberg, Iowa. (See sidebar.)

Be An Operator

You need not have boating experience to take a houseboat vacation. Most rental companies provide a minimum of an hour or two of training before they send travelers on their way. They teach people how to read river charts, drive the boat, avoid wingdams, operate around towboats, pull the boat onto a sandbar, anchor the boat and more.

"Nothing should go wrong, as long as you go through the training and listen to what the trainer tells you," said Nikki Jandro, owner of

Fun 'N The Sun Houseboat Vacations in Alma, Wis.

"The main thing is to stay away from the wingdams and stay in the navigation channel," Ehrlich said. "It's like driving on the road. You stay on the paved area and you don't drive in the ditch. If you stay in the channel, which is marked by buoys, you won't run into a wingdam, just as you won't run into a culvert if you don't drive in the ditch."

Often people feel a little nervous when they first start out on their own, Stirn said. "But, after a few minutes, most people start to relax. Ninety percent of the time they respond really well."

Those who don't are people who don't catch on to the mechanics of driving a boat or who struggle with making common-sense decisions, he said.

However, there are a few things you might want to consider before renting a houseboat. One could be cost.

Rental Strategies

If you need to watch your dollars, consider taking your houseboat vacation during the spring or fall. Most, if not all, rental companies have a three-tier pricing system. They charge their

lowest fees in April, May, early June and October; their mid-range fees in late June and most of September; and their highest fees in July, August and over Labor Day weekend. The season generally runs from mid-April or early May to mid- or late October.

By renting early or late in the season, you may experience cooler air and water temperatures, which are not the best for swimming and sunbathing. However, cooler temperatures can work to your advantage if you like to fish. "It's a matter of personal preference," Jandro said.

Also, consider the type of vacation you want. The river is quieter and the beaches less crowded in the off-season.

"Some people want the experience of being on the river and getting away from their cellphones and tele-

Five Questions to Ask Before Renting a Houseboat

1. How old is the boat?

Boats that are more than 10 or 15 years old tend to show wear and are more likely to have mechanical problems.

2. Who can I call if something goes wrong?

The rental company should give you the name and telephone number of someone to call if you have a problem.

3. What is your damage policy?

If you damage or break something, such as a propeller, you shouldn't be charged more than the item is worth.

4. How long have you been in business?

A houseboat rental company that has been in the business a long time might have a better idea about how to prepare you for your trip.

5. Do you have a cruising limit?

Some companies limit the distance you can travel, which may or may not be important to you.



(Tisha Sandberg)

visions," Stirn said. "They want their kids to find other sources of entertainment besides their video games, such as roasting hot dogs or tending to a fire. On the other hand, some people cannot live without all the amenities."

Most houseboats offer full kitchens, a shower, and a flush toilet, as well as bed linens and kitchen gear. In addition, many provide heat, air conditioning, TVs, VCRs, and DVD players. Some are outfitted with hot tubs and water slides. A few are built with fly bridges, enabling you to operate the houseboat from the upper deck.

These amenities will affect the cost of your vacation, as well as the type of experience you will have.

Renting a houseboat for a long weekend can range from \$800 to

\$3,900, depending on the size of the vessel and amenities. Most rental facilities offer three-day weekend, four-day mid-week, and full-week rentals. On a per-day basis, the mid-week and

Owners suggested making reservations six to nine months in advance. "Once January first hits, it's like the floodgates open."

full-week rentals are cheaper than weekend cruises.

How fast can you travel? Usually 7 or 8 mph is about the fastest you can go upstream, because you are going against the current. When driving downstream, you generally can speed up to about 11 or 12 mph.

Some rental companies place limits on how far you can travel. For instance, S & S Houseboat Rentals restricts travelers to a 67-mile range, while Huck's Houseboat Vacations has no restrictions.

Houseboats vary in size. The smallest are built for two to four people, and the largest accommodate as many as 14. Fun 'N The Sun, for instance, has two sizes. Its smaller vessels contain two bedrooms and accommodate two to four people, and its other vessels have five bedrooms, plus a pull-out sofa, to sleep up to 12.

Owners suggested making reservations six to nine months in advance. "Once January first hits, it's like the floodgates open," Ehrlich said.

(Houseboat continues on page 43)



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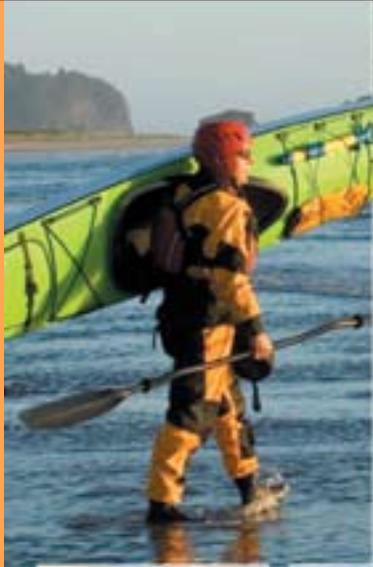
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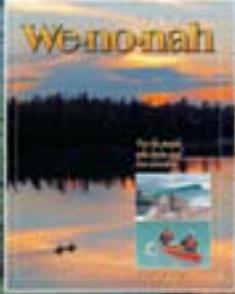
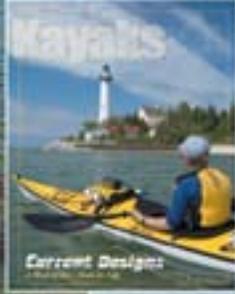
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Left: The Current Designs Carbon is a quick, nimble Greenland-style touring kayak. © Mike Tetzl

Right: The Wenonah Escape is a performance canoe with exceptional glide. © John Marshall



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Timber rattlesnakes blend into their surroundings near a den.

No critter on the Mississippi River has been so maligned and persecuted as our rattlesnakes.

The timber rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*, and the massasauga, *Sistrurus catenatus*, were once fairly common in the Upper Mississippi valley, but have declined because of deliberate and incidental killing by humans.

During one weekend in the 1800s, more than 400 timber rattlesnakes were killed on a single bluff near Homer, Minn. In the 1930s, the state of Illinois poured concrete into the timber rattlesnake dens at Mississippi Palisades State Park, despite the fact that not a single person had been bitten. When the rattlesnakes were destroyed, the park lost some of its wildness.

Massasaugas took a big hit during a 1972 study, when biologists K. D. Keenlyne and J. R. Beer killed 365 adults

The name "massasauga" comes from the Ojibwa words meaning "great river-mouth."

and their 832 unborn young in the Chippewa River bottoms. That population has never recovered.

Until recently, counties offered bounties to encourage the slaughter of rattlesnakes. Thousands were killed until both species became scarce.

As we learn more about rattlesnakes and the importance of the natural world, we have come to appreciate many species we once viewed as unimportant or dangerous.

Timber rattlesnakes are usually three to five feet long, sulfur yellow with jagged dark bands, a black tail and a tan rattle. Most have a rusty stripe down their backs. Some are nearly black or gray with darker bands.

Massasaugas have chunky bodies averaging 1.5 to 2.5 feet long. They are gray or brown with white-edged dark saddles down their backs and alternat-

Rattlesnakes along the Upper Mississippi

Timber Rattlers and Massasaugas

Photographs and text by Allen Blake Sheldon



A massasauga rests on the railroad tracks in the evening sun. Sometimes called swamp rattlers, massasaugas are chunkier and shorter than timber rattlesnakes, and have blotches instead of bands.

ing smaller blotches along their sides. Their rattles are dark.

Don't be confused by non-venomous snakes — including rat snakes, bull snakes and fox snakes — that take advantage of the rattler's reputation by coiling, hissing and buzzing their tails against dry leaves. They may look fearsome but are harmless.

Night Ambush

Rattlesnakes are venomous pit vipers, highly evolved for preying on small mammals. Timber rattlers sometimes actively hunt, but they usually lie in ambush at night. The rattler uses its forked tongue to find an active rodent trail along the top of a log. The snake coils and rests its jaw against the log and waits. The rattler's jaw detects vibrations of an approaching mouse. Its pupils, vertical slits by day, are fully dilated in the dark. Paired facial pits, located in front of the eyes, sense infrared light, allowing the rattler to "see" a warm-blooded target in the dark. As the snake's jaws open wide, its paired fangs, which normally rest

against the roof of the mouth, swing forward. The sudden strike stabs the fangs into the mouse as contracting muscles squeeze the venom glands, squirting venom through the hollow fangs into the mouse.

The snake recoils instantly to avoid getting bitten by the mouse. The venom quickly does its work and begins digesting the mouse. The snake uses its facial pits to re-locate the mouse, which it then swallows whole. Its jaws are connected by elastic ligaments that can stretch apart to accommodate larger prey, which includes voles, chipmunks, squirrels, small rabbits and an occasional bird.

Timber Rattlers

From the Quad Cities to Red Wing, Minn., the Mississippi River Valley holds scattered populations of timber rattlesnakes. Encounters aren't likely in Illinois. Iowa's best habitat begins north of the Maquoketa River, where steep limestone bluffs are dissected by V-shaped valleys, offering numerous rocky outcrops and bluff prairies.

This habitat is protected in several places, including Bellevue and Pike's Peak state parks and Effigy Mounds National Monument. The bluffs continue into Minnesota and up to Red Wing, but the snakes are no longer common there. Rattlesnakes are more easily found in Wisconsin. Good timber rattlesnake habitat remains along the river, including protected areas such as Perrot, Wyalusing, and Nelson Dewey state parks.

Timber rattlesnake dens, often shared with harmless snakes, are usually located on the southwestern or southern exposures of bluffs. A few rattlesnakes emerge from their dens to bask in the April sun, but most aren't out basking until mid-May.

Gravid females remain near the dens all summer, warming their developing young in sunny, open areas. Each female gives birth to six to nine young at the end of August or early September.

Timber rattlesnake males and non-gravid females spend the summer down in the forests or sometimes in



The yellowish coloration and rust-colored back stripe help identify this snake as a timber rattler.

croplands, where they're nocturnal in hot weather.

In August, male timber rattlesnakes are on the move looking for females, which may explain their appearance on golf courses or other unlikely places. After a female mates, she retains the sperm until spring, when she uses it to fertilize her eggs.

When two males meet, they duel by raising their heads as high as possible and trying to push each other over. Eventually one of the males crawls away in defeat.

In late summer, snakes return to their home dens. They come out to bask on warm days, but settle into their dens by mid-October.

Riverbottom Rattlers

Massasaugas have been found in Muscatine, Scott, and Clinton counties in Iowa. In Minnesota, the only documented sightings were near Wabasha in 1936, but 60 years later, John Meltzer spotted a courting pair in Houston County. Surveys in 2002 and 2003 yielded no sightings. In Wisconsin, small populations still live in the bottomlands of the Chippewa and Black rivers.

The name "massasauga" comes from the Ojibwa words meaning "great river-mouth." These rattlers live in riverbottoms and adjacent fields. They even spend winter in

the bottoms, where they hibernate individually in mammal burrows, old tree stumps or crayfish burrows. When evicted by flood waters in the spring, they crawl onto logs, muskrat houses or other dry perches.

Adult massasaugas feed primarily on voles, mice and shrews. Subadults are less discriminating and will eat frogs, other snakes, insects, birds and bird eggs.

The snakes usually court and breed in the spring, although they may do so in the fall. Gravid females often bask on humid, overcast days when they won't get too warm. In late August or early September the female bears three to 20 young. Like all rat-

tlesnakes, the new-born are equipped with fangs and venom. Massasaugas reach maturity during their third year.

Studies Underway

Timber rattlers and massasaugas and their habitats are being studied by state departments of natural resources and other researchers. Researchers mark captured snakes with tiny passive implant transponder tags (PIT tag) underneath their skin. The PIT tag doesn't help locate the snake, but a recaptured snake can be identified by scanning the tag through its skin.

Remaining populations that have been reduced below the threshold of viability — about 30 to 40 snakes, including four or five mature females — will gradually disappear.

Surgically implanted transmitters are placed in a few adults to track their movements.

Humans are rarely bitten by rattlesnakes. Rattlers probably only bite if they sense they are in danger. Both timber rattlesnakes and massasaugas are capable of killing an adult human, but deaths are very rare. About 25 percent of bites are actually dry bites, where no venom is injected.

Dr. Dan Keyler, a toxicologist at Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis and an authority on venomous snakebites, studied rattlesnake bites in Minnesota from 1982 to 2002. Timber rattlesnakes bit 15 people, but none of the 15 died and only five bites were serious enough to require treatment with anti-venom. At least six of the bites came from snakes that were pets or otherwise deliberately handled. For instance, a musician put a rattlesnake around the end of his guitar to liven up a country-western gig. It did. Another bite occurred when a photographer slipped and fell on his subject. Only five of the 15 people were not intentionally interacting with the snakes.

Stay Alert

To avoid becoming part of the next snakebite study, be alert in rattlesnake habitat. Wear boots. Don't stick your hand or foot into places that you cannot see. Step up on a log and check the other side before stepping over. Don't gather firewood after dark. If you see a rattlesnake, let it be.

Timber rattlesnakes are timid and not easily riled. Most will lie perfectly still, relying on camouflage to avoid detection and will not rattle unless disturbed. Most will just crawl away if given the opportunity.

To discourage rattlesnakes from hanging around your yard, remove boards, tin, brush piles or other hiding places. Remove grain or other rodent food. Do not kill the snakes' competition: rodent-eating harmless snakes. Drive a rattler out of your yard with a broom or by spraying it with a garden hose. The snake will avoid places of such harsh treatment. Call the department of natural resources or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and ask about snake relocation. Volunteers sometimes come out and pick up snakes.

If a rattlesnake bites you, don't risk another bite, waste time or increase your heart rate by killing the snake. A digital photo is useful for identification before treatment. Do not try any of the obsolete first-aid treatments, just get to a medical facility quickly.

Under (Some) Protection

Timber rattlers and endangered massasaugas are now protected in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. But more needs to be done. Even in refuges, misguided people sometimes think they are doing everyone a favor by killing a rattlesnake. A study by Keyler and Barney Oldfield found that the timber rattlesnake population at Great River Bluffs State Park, near Dakota, Minn., declined 90 percent from 1991 to 2003, due to poaching and den vandalism.

Protection is too late for populations that are already wiped out. Remaining populations that have been reduced below the threshold of viability — about 30 to 40 snakes, in-

Snakes in a Survey

Of the nearly 1,300 Minnesota residents who returned a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources survey, only a few (18%) knew that the timber rattler is protected by law.

And people out in the country are more accepting of rattlesnakes than those in urban and suburban areas.

"In rural areas, a lot of older residents remember seeing cleared bluffs and many snakes. They don't like getting startled by the snakes, but they don't mind them being there, as long as they stay at a safe distance," said Jaime Edwards, nongame wildlife specialist. "In urban areas, where developers are moving out into rattlesnake habitat, people don't even want to see any snakes. They tend to be intolerant of wildlife in general, even deer in their yards."

cluding four or five mature females — will gradually disappear. Even a viable population doesn't rebound easily, because a female timber rattlesnake doesn't breed until she is seven to nine years old, and then only every two to five years. Young rattlers suffer a high mortality rate.

Rattlesnake habitat continues to be lost as wetlands are filled, houses are built on the sides of bluffs and encroaching cedars replace open basking sites.

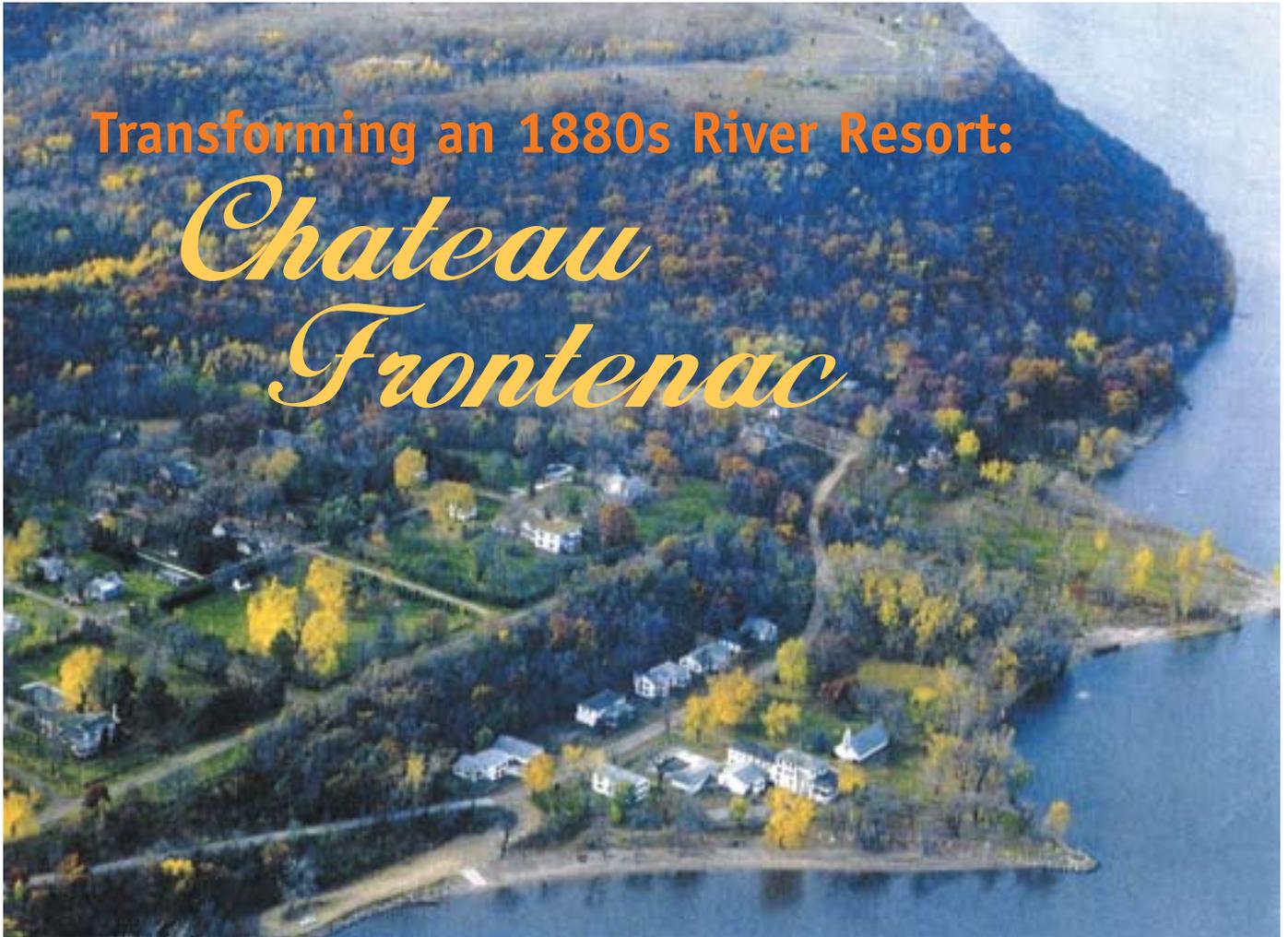
On the plus side, there are ongoing rattlesnake relocation efforts and an emphasis on education. Great River Bluffs State Park has increased security. Timber rattlers are among a multitude of species that benefit when conservation groups protect bluffs, remove invading cedars and restore bluff prairies.

Hopefully, the Upper Mississippi will never become so tame, so civilized, so downright unnatural and boring, that no room is left for these fascinating reptiles. 🐍

Allen Blake Sheldon's photographs often appear in Big River. His last story was "Mississippi Mudpuppies," May-June 2006.

Transforming an 1880s River Resort:

Chateau Frontenac



This aerial view of Frontenac shows Chateau Frontenac on the riverfront, with the village on a plateau behind it. The bluff at the top of the photograph is Point-No-Point, also called Garrards Bluff. The bluff and the wooded hills around the village are part of Frontenac State Park. Frontenac was named Waconia by the Native Americans, Fort Beauharnois in 1727, Western Landing in 1837, Westervelt in 1854, and Frontenac, in honor of Count Frontenac, in 1859. (Bill Flies)

By Kate Halverson

As you pass through the tiny, unincorporated town of Frontenac Station, halfway between Red Wing and Lake City, Minn., on Highway 61, you see a small café, a shop or two and a few houses. You'd never know that there's another, very different town behind this one. In the late 1800s Old Frontenac was a riverside resort town that attracted visitors from all over the country. With its grand old homes, shady oaks and stone fences, it is one of the only preserved Civil War communities along the Upper Mississippi. Today it's also the site of some ambitious renovation.

Old Frontenac is surrounded by Frontenac State Park and Lake Pe-

pin, a wide stretch of the river. The park includes the highest point in the area, a 450-foot bluff and a spit of land that steamboat pilots named "Point No Point" because from miles

"Frontenac looks like it did in the 1880s on the outside although the homes have changed on the inside."

away it seems to jut out into the lake. When approached from downriver, the point recedes as the river makes a sharp westward bend.

Few traces remain of the early Native American inhabitants and noth-

ing remains of the first European explorers, who were sponsored by a Frenchman named Count Frontenac in 1680. In 1837 James (Bully) Wells established a trading post here. In 1854 two brothers, Brigadier General Israel Garrard and Lewis Garrard, visited the area on a hunting trip. They were so impressed with Frontenac's idyllic location and beauty that they brought their families up the river from Cincinnati, eventually purchasing 4,000 acres, 320 designated for the village, which they named Westervelt.

By 1867 the industrious Garrard family converted a warehouse into the Lakeside Hotel and a general store into a theater, bar, and a billiard

hall known as The Pavilion. Nine other hotel “cottage” buildings expanded the complex between 1870 and 1881. From 1867 to 1937 the levee area was an active commercial, hospitality and resort center, hosting wealthy visitors from all over the country. It was known as the “Newport of the North.”

Old Frontenac and several of its remaining buildings were eventually placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and 1973.

But there are many Civil War-era buildings in towns along the river. Bill Flies, a member of Frontenac’s Heritage Preservation Commission, explains why Frontenac is unique:

“When we say it is a preserved Civil War community, we mean a community that has not been changed by streets, sidewalks, businesses, etc. Other communities have new businesses and have converted their stone streets to asphalt or cement. Basically, Frontenac looks like it did in the 1880s on the outside although the homes have changed on the inside. Other towns have buildings dating back to the Civil War, but they sit on 21st-century roads with 21st-century neighboring buildings. We have attempted to keep the entire village, which is the historic district, preserved, not just a few buildings,” said Flies.

That’s an ambitious plan. Bill and Linda Flies have learned a lot about the history of Frontenac as a result of trying to save one piece of property in it.

“We started out as seasonal residents, buying a small two-bedroom stone cottage in 1973,” Linda explained. “The house was built by a clammer, with shells actually incorporated into the cement walls, and barbed clam racks in the basement and the yard.”

The Flies and their children enjoyed their cottage with its 100 feet of lakeshore for 10 years.

“We took a lot of walks over the years, passing by the old Lakeside Hotel property. After the Methodist camp closed, we watched it enter into even more of a state of disrepair,” said Bill. (The Methodist Church had bought the property in 1939 and



Pepin House was restored in 1996 and operated as a bed-and-breakfast inn until 2001. Now it is a private home. (Bill Flies)



The porch of what was the Lakeside Hotel looks out on Lake Pepin. (Kate Halverson)

used it as a retreat center for many decades.)

“For ten years the property sat for sale as we dreamed about what it could be, hoping a good buyer would surface,” added Linda.

Finally, with Bill’s two businesses thriving, they decided to become that good buyer themselves. In 1986 they bought the entire five-acre levee parcel with a thousand feet of lakeshore and started turning their dreams into reality. “The first thing we did was start attending Historic Preservation committee meetings,” said Bill. “The

committee was not aware that much of their 1974 charter was null and void due to outdated bylaws.”

The Flieses set about researching their new property. They decided to name it Chateau Frontenac because it is truly an estate with many buildings. They even traveled to Cincinnati in search of General Garrard’s roots.

“Pronouncing the g with a j sound, no one knew who we were talking about,” Bill said. “We later discovered that the Garrards were known as the ‘Gurr-ar-ds.’” The more guttural g sound led them across the river to the



The Lakeside Hotel opened in 1867. The stairs to the right linked the resort area on the levee with the village above it. In 140 years the hotel went through several transformations. Plans now call for it to become a condominium. (Courtesy of Bill Flies)



Kittle House, in the foreground, was known as Grapevine Cottage when it provided lodging for resort guests. (Courtesy of Bill Flies)



Resort guests bathe at the beach on Lake Pepin in 1890. (Courtesy of Bill Flies)



Kittle House was restored in 2006. (Bill Flies)



A panoramic view of the Frontenac Inn resort was taken in 1920 and appeared on a postcard. (Courtesy of Bill Flies)

Garrards' true Kentucky origins.

Eventually, they compiled a complete history on all eight buildings on the property, a job made easier by the fact that Frontenac is a well-documented historic district.

"From old pictures we were able to duplicate veranda posts, rails and spindles. Windows, shutters and

roof colors were available from multiple pictures as the property evolved through the decades," said Bill.

Pepin House

The Flieses started their restoration work with the Pepin House, which was built in 1946 and was the newest and least deteriorated building on the

property.

This white colonial clapboard building was constructed from remnants of a demolished church from Reads Landing, Minn. The former 10-bedroom dormitory sits 100 feet from the shoreline and faces a chapel. Its

(Frontenac continues on page 46)

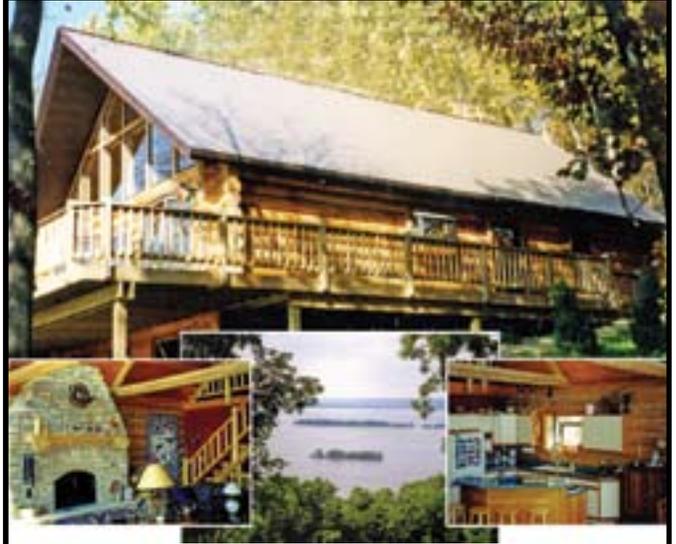
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Taking it to the Bank

The Joys of Bank Fishing

By Rich Brockmann

Uh-oh, there it goes! My bobber disappears. My muscles tighten in anticipation as I take up the slack and get ready to set the hook.

There are few things I find more exciting in this world than sitting on the riverbank watching my bobber disappear. Fishing the backwaters, it could be anything from a small sunfish to a fierce, six-pound northern.

The folks out in the boats sometimes seem to look at bank fishermen like me with disdain, because, after all, how could someone catch fish without investing a large chunk of hard-earned cash in a nice boat, motor, electronics and lots of fancy tackle?

Well, let me tell you a little secret — that old codger sitting on the bank watching his bobber may be catching a lot more fish than the big-time boys out in their stylish boats. Furthermore, he may be enjoying his simple fishing experience a lot more than the guys in the boats.

I'll always remember that spring day when I was sitting on a rock on the shore of Lake Pepin catching nice crappies, when three guys in a boat came trolling by. I overheard one of the guys saying in a rather loud voice over the drone of the motor, "Look at that guy on the bank, he has the ultimate relaxing experience." I suspect he would have traded places with me in a microsecond, because he knew that I was king of the world that day.

Do you remember how excited you were as a kid, standing on a riverbank casting your line and watching your bobber in great anticipation? Well, it is just as exciting for kids of any age, even old retired ones like me.

Part of the excitement and fun of bank fishing comes

from things that have nothing to do with fishing tackle: the winter days at home pouring over detailed river maps in search of potential new "hot holes;" the forays trying to

locate those new hot spots; and, finally, the ecstasy when one of them turns out to be a new honey hole that no one else has discovered yet. Oh, my! Life is good.

Bank fishing would probably be more popular if someone was making a lot of money on it. Boat and tackle manufacturers do not depend on bank fishermen for their livelihood, because bank fishermen spend next to nothing for their equipment and are not taken in by the fads. About all they buy is new line for their reels occasionally and some inexpensive tackle to replace what has been lost to dreaded snags.

Probably the most high-tech item that a bank fisherman uses is a slip bobber. And thank goodness for slip bobbers, because they enable someone sitting on the bank to get the bait to where the fish are — at any depth — and to keep it there. A slip bobber

also lets you cast your bait a long distance, thus covering more water from your spot on the bank.

Another tip that I learned many years ago is to keep all of my tackle and worms in a small shoulder bag. That way I can roam around with all my stuff, while having my hands free to tend to the fishing. As Martha Stewart would say, "A shoulder bag is a good thing."

I am a big believer in using a small one- or two-inch twister-type tail for bait. I just put one on a little 1/32- or 1/16-ounce jig and tip it with a waxworm or very small piece of night crawler. Add a small bobber, and I'm ready



"Oh, my! Life is good." The author displays a northern pike that he caught while fishing on the banks of the Mississippi.

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for action. I have found this to be a deadly combination for most types of fish in the backwaters.

After I cast it out, I move the bobber a foot or so every few seconds to entice them to bite. The fish usually can't resist. White, purple and black are my favorite twister tail colors. I occasionally use minnows for bait, but carrying a minnow bucket around kind of cramps my style, so I usually stick with twister tails and worms. One can also find a few spinners in my bag for casting when the spirit moves me.

I bank fish the big river any month of the soft-water season, but my favorite time is October and November. When the leaves start turning and there is a nip in the air, I really get the fever. The bugs are gone by then, as are most of the other fishermen, so I usually have the good holes all to myself. Sunfish, crappie, perch and bass all seem to bite in the shallows then, and the fast action helps to keep me warm in the chilly autumn air. The occasional good-sized northern adds to the excitement. I usually bundle up and keep going out until freeze-up. During my fall fishing forays, it is always a special treat to hear and see a large flock of swans flying over.

Spring is another favorite time, when the sunfish are on their beds in the shallows. They are sometimes a little spooky about biting then, so I just use a plain baited hook with no weight and a very small bobber. They can't seem to resist the bait gliding slowly through the water towards where they are laying. It is such a thrill when one of those big guys is on the line pulling harder than a two-pound walleye. It doesn't get any better than that!

Another advantage of bank fishing is, if they aren't biting at one place, it is quick and easy to jump into the car and drive a few miles to another spot where the action may be hot and heavy.

I have to admit that part of my satisfaction comes from the simplicity of it all, knowing that I am taking on the fish pretty much on their terms without a lot of high-powered mechanical and electronic equipment. Also, the simple experience of sitting on the bank of the big river is great therapy for one's soul. It brings a certain peace and harmony into one's life.

I could go on and on about the excitement and joy of bank fishing, but I wonder if I haven't already revealed too much. So go out and give it a try, but please stay out of my secret holes. 🌊

Rich Brockmann lives in Rochester, Minn., but his heart is by the river near Winona. This is his first story in Big River.



These crappies will make a tasty dinner. (Rich Brockmann)



"There are few things I find more exciting in this world than sitting on the riverbank watching my bobber disappear."

Cajun Dining In La Crosse

Buzzard Billy's

By Reggie McLeod

Photos courtesy of Buzzard Billy's

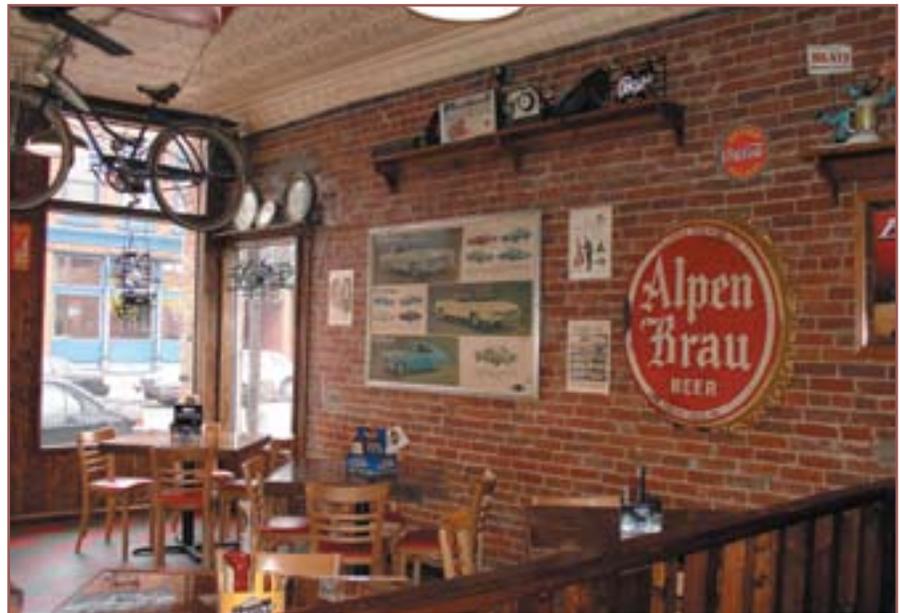
Most rivertowns would envy the vitality of La Crosse, Wisconsin's, downtown. Its convention center helps keep several hotels busy. Corporate offices and a variety of retail businesses bring employees and customers downtown every day. Strategically placed parking structures provide a free place to stash the vehicle, while you attend to business and/or pleasure. On summer evenings young and old visitors and locals stroll along the river in beautiful Riverside Park and watch the sun set on the river. After dark a boisterous club scene comes alive and grows livelier right up until closing time.

Smack in the middle of all this, Buzzard Billy's serves up tasty Cajun fare and cold beer in a lively, casual atmosphere that matches the mood on the street outside. But don't be misled by the goofy cacophony of props and old signs; the 1960s-era trading cards sealed into the tabletops; or the televisions up in the corners showing sports events. The food proves that there is some genuine focus and purpose in the kitchen.

My companion and I have eaten here dozens of times since the Cafe opened a decade ago, but the last time we dropped in was in the middle of a rainy, blustery Sunday afternoon. We were concerned that our timing might result in a so-so meal, but we were wrong.

I ordered one of my favorites, Seafood Jambalaya with hush puppies and a pint of Downtown Brown, the house beer. My thirsty companion settled on the Blackened Walleye and a hearty share of my beer.

The walleye was perfect — firm



Vintage props and signs create a casual atmosphere.

and fresh, and blackened not too much, with seasoning more subtle than she expected. After I sampled it, I was a little jealous. The fillet hung

If I'm really hungry and not facing any demanding intellectual efforts for a couple of hours, I'll order the Seafood Pirogue.

over the edge of the plate. My companion even raved about the fresh steamed vegetables and rice that came with it.

My jealousy quickly faded as I dug into my jambalaya. The shrimp and crayfish were succulent and fresh. The generous bowl full of jambalaya was plenty spicy, which sent me to the beer and hush puppies from time to time. The only thing on the table that didn't merit our enthusiasm was the

French bread, which has always been kind of wimpy. That's one reason that I almost always get an order of hush puppies. The other reason is that they are crispy, slightly sweet and seem to go so well with everything I order.

I have never eaten dessert here or brought home leftovers. I always finish with a clean plate and a full belly, and that Sunday afternoon was no exception. Our waitress presented a good case for the New Orleans Bread Pudding, which the menu describes as "A combination of apples, cinnamon, raisins and chopped pecans, topped with a sugar glaze and a rich Cointreau sabion sauce." The Gourmet Turtle Cheesecake sounded pretty good, too, but I probably won't get a chance to try either one unless I drop by some afternoon just for dessert and coffee.

My test for a new Cajun restaurant is the beans and rice, and that's one of my other favorites at Buzzard

Billy's, with a side of hush puppies. If I'm really hungry and not facing any demanding intellectual efforts for a couple of hours, I'll order the Seafood Pirogue. Named after the tiny skiff that a standing pilot poles through the bayou, this pirogue is a hollowed out half of a large eggplant, deep-fried and filled with seafood in a creamy, mildly spicy sauce. It's rich and complex, and there's a lot of it. Pretty soon your stomach is aching and your waitress is standing next to you describing the desserts. No way!

The extensive menu features plenty of Cajun items, including Crawfish Etoufee, Chicken Czarina and two alligator dishes — an appetizer and a sandwich. It also includes well-spiced jerked chicken, steaks, burgers and other standard fare, as well as a good variety of beers and mixed drinks.

The bare brick walls of the dining room and bar make the room noisier than it would otherwise be. Smoking is permitted in the bar area, but the high ceilings and good ventilation keep the air fairly clean in the rest of the place.

Buzzard Billy's is on historic Pearl St., between bar-lined Third St. and more sanguine Second St., about a block from Riverside Park. A parking structure fills the block behind it.

I recall listening to country western bands in this building umpteen years ago, when it was a biker bar called "The Three Deuces." I don't miss the Deuces, but I sure would miss Buzzard Billy's.

Since it opened its doors as the American House Hotel, in 1867, the building housed a series of businesses, including the Totten Hotel, Humpty Dumpty Cafe and the Ace Hotel and Restaurant, according to Rob Larson, Buzzard Billy's general manager.

He also manages the Starlite Lounge, a 1950s- and- 1960s-era-themed martini bar upstairs.

Across the street is the store that boasts the invention of the "cheddar head," those hats that look like a large

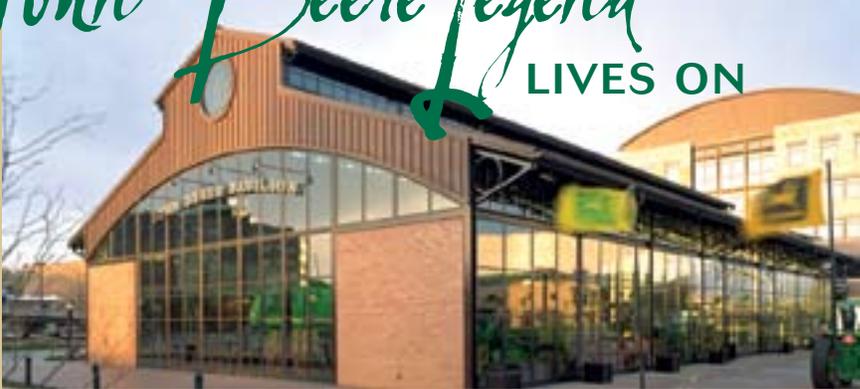


wedge of cheese that are so popular at Green Bay Packer games. There is also an ice cream parlor, a bookstore and numerous gift shops within a couple of blocks. Boaters can tie up at the park nearby. Buzzard Billy's is at 222 Pearl St., La Crosse, Wis., 608-796-2277. 🍷

Reggie McLeod is editor of Big River.

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(MRT continued from page 19)

“Trail-building is always a game of patience,” noted Mark Wyatt, executive director of the Iowa Bicycle Coalition.

The stretches of the Iowa trail that are still on highways are safe, said Wyatt. Many segments have traffic counts of only 500 vehicles per day or fewer.

Neighboring Minnesota demonstrates the complexity of the trail. It has 800 miles of Mississippi River Trail, on both banks. Forty-five percent of the trail is on county roads; 25 percent on state and U.S. highways; 15 percent on state, regional or local trails; 13 percent on local and township roads; and the rest on state forest and state park roads.

One challenge is raising money for trail maintenance. “We’ve been very successful creating grant programs to construct trails,” said Taylor. “Securing funds to build trails short-term has been much easier than securing maintenance funds for trails long-term.” Asphalt crumbles after about 15 years.

Does the trail bring new visitors who spend money? Tracking the dollars that trail users leave behind in a community is difficult. Iowa estimates that the trail will add \$20 million to the state’s economy each year. But how can you track how much money trail users spend? “They don’t have to check in at a front desk like a hotel user,” admits the Quad Cities’ Taylor.

The Mississippi River Trail is a work in progress, but at least the roads are all paved — except for some gravel stretches in Aitkin County, Minn. Hospitality along the trail now is more formal now than when Ackelson biked the river in 1974. You’ll probably have to buy your own dinner and beer. 🌳 🌳

Marc Hequet is a contributing editor for Big River magazine.

Disclosure: MRT is a client of Riverwise Inc. publishing company, which produces Big River magazine. Riverwise has produced many of the MRT trail maps.



The MRT maps indicate the status of each stretch of the trail. The northern-most Illinois map is linked online to the rest of the Illinois trail maps.



Bikers often share the trail with pedestrians, as here in Dubuque, Iowa. (Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation)

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(Houseboat continued from page 24)



Houseboats are shallow-draft boats, but some people tow canoes for getting into the backwaters and away from the gang. (Bob Myers)

However, if you decide later, or even at the last minute, to take a houseboat vacation, don't hesitate to call for reservations. Sometimes rental facilities have cancellations and are hoping to book another group.

You need not pack much for your trip — just towels, clothing, personal grooming items, and whatever food and beverages you need.

Oh, and you might want to carry along a good attitude, Stirn said. "If we can get people to change their attitude for just a couple of days, that's when it is the most relaxing."

"It's a great adventure," Wildes said. 🦢 🌿

Becky Sisco is a freelance writer who lives in Dubuque, Iowa. Her last story for Big River was "Catfish Charlie's" March-April 2007.

Big River welcomes your comments. Send to Big River, PO Box 204, Winona, MN 55987; or editors@big-river.com.

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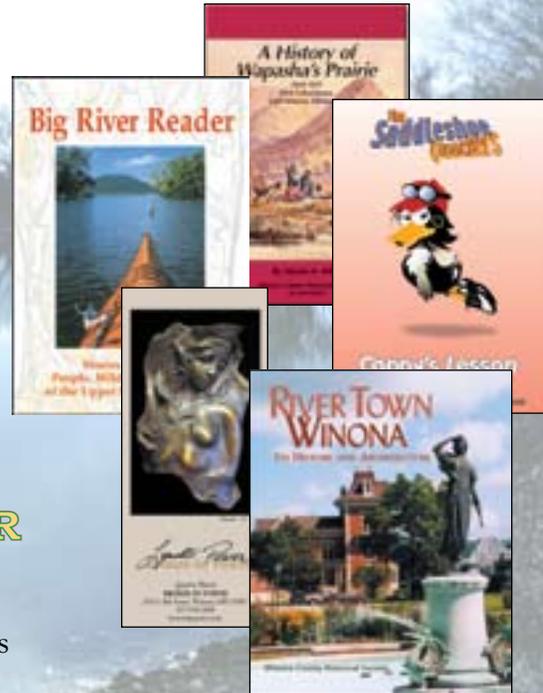
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(Army Road continued from page 64)

more of the plants that birds feed on. Partners in the project include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Audubon's Upper Mississippi River Initiative and the Rivers and Bluffs Fall Birding Festival. You cannot drive on the dikes, but you can walk on them.

In spring or early summer, walking the road is an acoustic experience as much as a visual one, especially at twilight. Cranes call from several directions. Geese honk, frogs croak,

*This really is the old river,
the way it was before the
locks and dams were built in
the 1930s.*

and unseen ducks paddle quickly away through the reeds, their feet and wings whirring over the water.

Wild Place

Ric Zarwell, a board member of the Friends of Pool 9, grew up in New Albin and remembers the road as just one of the places where he and friends used to go fishing and looking for adventure.

"Army Road is the best place to get access to the floodplain forest. I don't know anyplace else like this. It is in a class by itself — it's wild all the way out," he said.

It's been a favorite place for locals for many decades — in fact, for longer than it's been called "Army Road." In the early 1900s it was just a low-lying track that led out of town and through the river bottoms to Minnesota Slough. Local people used it for hunting and fishing, but water flooded the track whenever river water levels rose, which cut people off from the river. Before Army Road was built in the 1960s, Iowans had to trailer their boats to Minnesota to put in. That was a serious annoyance and one of the prime reasons the road was built.

"There used to be summer homes along Minnesota Slough, and shanties along the road. The road itself

was used heavily up until the refuge was created. [The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge was established in 1924.] Then it was abandoned and people moved away," recounted Zarwell.

"The road started in the same place, but it used to come out near an artesian well. There was a pipe that stood up out of the ground and people would drive out there and reach up to get the water." Zarwell has a photograph of his father standing up in a Model T and reaching up to get a jug of water.

"You can still find the pipe, but you have to reach over the gunwales of your boat to get at it," Zarwell said.

The road was raised by a foot last year to keep it above surrounding wetlands, but it's still a bumpy road with water all around, so go slow. Besides, resident turtles have the right-of-way in the summer.

End of the Road

Army Road ends at the boat landing, with picnic tables, informational kiosks, restrooms and a fishing platform. Minnesota Slough is a sizable side channel and a gateway to the vast maze of sloughs and channels that make up Reno Bottoms. This really is the old river, the way it was before the locks and dams were built in the 1930s.

At the end of the road you'll be about two miles from the Iowa bluffs and two miles from the Wisconsin bluffs. That's a big wide, open space — enough to make you a little dizzy.

Returning to New Albin, if you have time to poke around town, you can check out the city park and the community center, both sources of pride. You can also investigate New Albin's reputation as Baseball City.

There are a few pubs and eateries in town, not to mention the City Meat Market and Grocery, an old-fashioned grocery store, of the kind they're not making anymore. It has few aisles, but the shelves are packed, and there's a meat market in the back that offers a fine selection of homemade smoked meats and fish. Their pork jerky is the best. I haven't tried the fresh cheese curds. 🍷

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(Frontenac continued from page 32)



St. Hubert's Lodge was built by Israel Garrard in 1856 for a hunting lodge. When the lodge became popular, Garrard built the Lake Side Hotel. Today the lodge is a private residence.

open porch looks out onto forested bluffs. A stone road trails back toward the site of the area's first trading post.

The Flieses stripped Pepin House down to its foundation but kept the framework intact. Linda ran it as a bed-and-breakfast from 1996 to 2001. "It was very successful, but zoning restrictions for an expanded com-

The dilapidated but historically significant hotel will be resurrected as a seven-unit condominium.

mercial plan caused us to simplify our plans. Besides, B & B's are a lot of work!" Linda said

The house has been home to Bill and Linda since 2001. Walking through the restored Pepin House, one is captivated with the home's warmth, right from the entry, a large foyer with a cherry and enamel staircase and maple flooring. A large living room/dining area has views of the river and features comfy seating, artwork, books and a well-used fireplace. A simple, classic kitchen behind the dining room gives the cook a bird's-eye view of Lake Pepin.

Three large bedroom suites, one with a grand piano, make it difficult to choose which bedroom one would have chosen when it was a B & B.

Kittle House

Next, the Flieses restored the Kittle House, which was originally built in 1868 as a family home. They completed it in 2006 and plan to sell it as a private home. Kittle House is set back from the lake about a half a block but directly faces the water and has views from its upper balcony and front stoop.

Smaller than the Pepin House, Kittle House has oak millwork, eight-inch crown molding and elm flooring. The new kitchen has granite counters, a full pantry and a view of the lake. All bathrooms are modern but feature period fixtures and hardware. A gas fireplace and two full windows grace the living room. A new garage, expanded driveways, and landscaping complete the update.

"The interiors of the buildings were rather sparse since they were 19th-century western frontier appointments,"



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said Bill Flies. “We brought the interiors up to the level of the better homes of the period, with a lot more millwork, crown moldings, fireplace mantles, and we used colors from those periods.”

After the property was rezoned from commercial to residential, the Flieses demolished a few buildings to comply with zoning regulations for more renovation.

Next, they plan to restore the original Lakeside Hotel, which was first built by the Garrards and purchased by Celestine Schaller in 1907.

“She renamed it The Frontenac Inn and made it famous for delicious Sunday chicken dinners,” Bill said.

The dilapidated but historically significant hotel will be resurrected as a seven-unit condominium. They plan to restore it to its original size, including a two-story carriage house, a large

entrance lobby, additional verandas, an exercise area, a community gathering room, parking for today’s “horses,” and an elevator/staircase system for transporting residents.

The Flieses say they plan to continue living in Pepin House, although they may live in other houses as they finish them. They do not consider themselves developers.

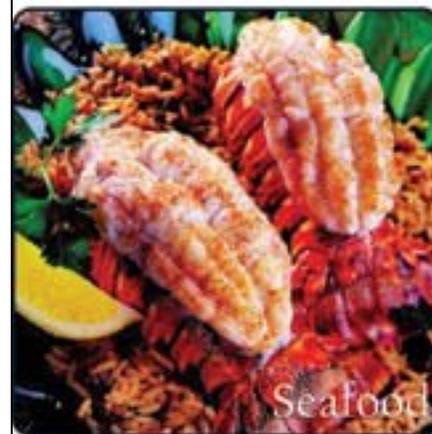
“We’d rather be known as historians, out of love for Frontenac and the quest to establish as complete and accurate a history as possible,” Bill said. “We believe in heritage preservation. We want to preserve the look and feel of the 19th century, but with improvements that make the project financially sound and desirable for today’s uses.”

Kate Halverson is an author and interior designer. She owns Touch of Class Interiors, in Minneapolis and Lake City, Minn.

Winona Cottage, which was not part of the resort, was built by Israel Garrard as a wedding present for his son George. Today it is a private residence. Note the original stone fence surrounding the property.



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(River News continued from page 13)

gasify coal. The company plans to dig new wells to provide additional water, but if a geological survey shows the area cannot support the new wells, the company will turn to the river. If so, said company President John Diesch, regulators will make sure that water intake will pose no danger to Mississippi wildlife.

Beth Baranski, member of the Jo Daviess County Board of Supervisors, wanted the board to require the company to report periodically on its carbon-dioxide emissions plan and to pay for a consultant to study noise pollution, should there be a complaint. But the board did not consider Baranski's amendments.

Diesch said that, by using "clean coal," the plant will emit far less carbon dioxide than it now does and will not create more noise than it currently does.

Engineers are now designing the coal gasification facility, and the permit applications have been filed with various agencies. Diesch said he expects the facility to be completed by the end of 2009.

Dollars for Development

Dubuque, Iowa — In April, Dubuque won a \$3 million federal grant to help build a marina for transient boaters on the river in front of the Grand River Convention Center and Star Brewery. Construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2008.

This spring the Diamond Jo Casino began construction on a large new casino, which will include more tables and slot machines than its current facility, as well as a poker room, three restaurants, a bowling center and an entertainment/banquet center. The \$55 million casino is scheduled to open in the summer of 2008.

The casino is giving its boat and Portside Building to the Dubuque County Historical Society, which operates the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium. The society will renovate the building to accommodate a wide-screen digital movie theater, called Rivermax, and a National Great Rivers Center, where people can learn about rivers beyond

the Mississippi. The renovation will cost about \$38 million, which includes an \$8 million grant from the Vision Iowa program. Officials expect museum attendance to nearly double from its current 230,000 visitors per year.

Also at Ice Harbor, the Durrant Group, a Dubuque architectural firm, plans to build its corporate headquarters on the site of a vacant foundry at East Fifth St. and Ice Harbor Drive, to be completed by December. Durrant will use the same footprint as the foundry and reuse the building's frames, trusses and columns.

Durrant and local investors hope to expand the project later to create at least 320,000 square feet of retail, commercial and condominium space. The total cost is projected at \$63 million.

To accommodate all the activity, the City of Dubuque will build a multi-story parking ramp costing \$23 million.

Sandy Concerns

Clayton, Iowa — It may take a while for Pattison Sand Company, LLC, a mining and quarrying company in Clayton, and regulatory agencies to settle the agencies' concerns about Pattison's operations on the Mississippi River.

"It's a pretty complicated situation," said Scott Gritters, an Iowa Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist. "They've got a lot of moving parts up there."

While excavating a quarry site, Pattison started to build a water intake structure that would suck up 1,000 gallons of river water per minute. That level of water intake could threaten a walleye spawning area, which biologists believe lies upriver from the structure.

"But we've never documented it," Gritters said.

Perhaps more important, the structure is built on a bed of Higgin's eye pearly mussels, an endangered species.

Although Pattison obtained some of the permits it needed for digging the quarry, it did not obtain all it needed, including a permit for the water-intake structure.

Gritters said Pattison and agencies have been trying to work on some solutions, but he does not know whether the company will be required to remove the intake pipe.

According to Gritters, the operation also raises some air- and water-quality concerns. "There is going to be a lot more going on there yet," he said.

Sackhouse Saved

St. Paul — The St. Paul Housing and Redevelopment Authority approved a \$9.5 million rehabilitation project March 14 to convert an abandoned grain terminal on the riverfront to a restaurant and interpretive center.

A farmers' cooperative built the "headhouse and sackhouse" structure in 1931, the first of its kind in the United States. The six-story headhouse is all that remains of the Minnesota Farmers Union's 90-elevator complex. It was designed to load grain onto barges, providing an attractive alternative to the rail transport then favored by grain companies.

Construction of the headhouse and sackhouse helped convince Congress to authorize a nine-foot-deep shipping channel. It also countered a key argument against creating a lock-and-dam system and nine-foot-deep channel on the Mississippi: Why send barges all the way to St. Paul when it had nothing to ship back downstream?

After construction of the headhouse and sackhouse, wheat and other grain from Minnesota and the Dakotas could be shipped from St. Paul, if St. Paul could swipe some of the business from the rail yards at Minneapolis.

A farm cooperative had built grain elevators along the river in St. Paul in 1915, but low river levels foiled Mississippi transport, and traffic through the new Panama Canal all but halted Mississippi River shipping.

The building's first floor will house the restaurant, and the second floor will house the interpretive center and an overlook of the Mississippi. Construction is scheduled to begin this year and be complete in May of 2008.



Campgrounds Open

Brainerd, Minn. — Campgrounds along the Mississippi River above Minneapolis will offer full services again this year after budget cuts reduced services in 2006.

The Army Corps of Engineers St. Paul District said it would open, operate and take reservations for all six of its Mississippi River Headwaters' campgrounds in 2007, and all sites will again have showers, running water, dump stations and fish-cleaning facilities.

Last year, facing budget shortfalls, the Corps mulled whether to close some campgrounds, but it finally decided to open all of the sites with reduced services.

The St. Paul District's six campgrounds in northern Minnesota are Gull Lake Dam and Recreation Area near Brainerd; Cross Lake Dam and Recreation Area in Crosslake; Sandy Lake Dam and Recreation Area near McGregor; Leech Lake Dam and Recreation Area in Federal Dam; Pokegama Dam and Recreation Area in Grand Rapids; and Winnibigoshish Dam and Recreation Area near Deer River.

Campers can reserve Army Corps of Engineers campsites by calling 877-444-6777 (TDD 877-833-6777) or online. ♡

Trouble on the Bluff

McGregor, Iowa — Developers of the proposed Highland Bluffs Golf and Water Play Resort on the bluffs above McGregor, are selling the troubled property to buyers in Texas. After running into trouble on several fronts, Jim Daughtry, managing partner, apparently decided to retire. (*Telegraph Herald*, 4-6-07)

On April 3, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources referred a stormwater runoff violation case against the resort to the Iowa Attorney General's office for legal action.

Some runoff continues into Sny Magill Creek, a state-protected trout stream. The company hired to provide erosion monitoring and mitigation is on the list of liens and is no longer involved in the project. According to Concerned Citizens of

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Dakota Homecoming

Winona, Minn. — Dakota (Sioux) Indian people from across the United States and Canada will come to Winona this summer for the fourth annual Hdihunipi, or Great Dakota Gathering and Homecoming. The event, held on June 2 and 3, is inspired by a spirit of reconciliation more than 150 years after the Dakota were forced from their river home by the influx of white soldiers and settlers.

The event is sponsored by the Winona Dakota Unity Alliance, an organization formed by community members, along with the City of Winona and Dakota people. This year's homecoming will include music, drumming, feasts, entertainment, a moccasin game tournament and an educational encampment. The public is welcome.



(Cynthia Porter)

Clayton County, at least five “mechanic’s liens” have been filed against the company, River Bluff Resort, LLC. According to the DNR attorney Jon Tack, some soil stabilization structures are in place.

Meanwhile, the developers dropped their \$10 million “SLAPP” (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) lawsuit against four members of the Concerned Citizens group. A SLAPP lawsuit is a civil complaint or counterclaim filed against private individuals or organizations, alleging that they have damaged a project by their efforts to influence government action on issues of public interest or concern. The suit was filed in 2003.

Island Showtime

Madison, Ill. — Chouteau Island is the common name of a three-island group in the Mississippi above St. Louis, built after WWII to divert large boats away from the dangerous “chain of rocks” by creating a canal on the Illinois side of the river. Now it is mostly public property and full of wildlife. Some people dump trash there, and river-cleanup volunteers pick up trash each year. Last October, hunters discovered the body of a stabbing victim on the island.

The mayor of Madison, Ill., John Hamm, has had enough of the dastardly debris. He plans to install a network of 22 cameras on the 5,500 acres to keep an eye on things and document vehicles crossing the is-

land’s Canal Bridge from Illinois. (*Belleville News-Democrat*, 2-12-07)

This isn’t Madison’s first surveillance system. It uses cameras in public and senior housing, and has contracted with the Housing Authority to install cameras in other housing projects in the area.

Geocaching on the Refuge

Winona, Minn. — Geocaching, the popular activity in which participants hide objects outdoors so others can find them using their Global Positioning System (GPS) units, is prohibited on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. So, in order to allow a geocaching-like experience, the refuge staff has developed an alternative game in which fans follow clues and get rewards for discovering answers.

Clues and coordinates are posted on the refuge website. Players explore the refuge to solve the clues, write down the answers, then return to the refuge office with their tallies to receive a reward for correct answers. They are also encouraged to take photos of themselves, some of which will be posted on the website.

You need a GPS unit to play. Clues on the site will take players to landmarks, features or signs reaching from Weaver to Winona on both sides of the river. Students and experienced geocachers helped test the high-tech scavenger hunt. 🐾

Good Swan Spots

La Crosse, Wis. — Tundra swans have flown back over the Upper Mississippi to their Arctic nesting grounds by now, but last fall a record number spent a good amount of time on the Upper Miss Refuge during their southern migration. Aerial bird counts on the refuge found 52,070 swans on one day. The previous record was 34,730 in 2005.

More than 20,000 of the swans were in Pool 8, which extends from Dresbach, Minn., to Genoa, Wis. Pool 8 was the site of a drawdown in 2001 and new island building, both of which created more food and shelter for the big birds.

Refuge biologist Eric Nelson speculated that the restored islands gave them better protection from wind and waves; and the Wisconsin Islands area, which was closed to hunting, made the birds feel secure enough to stick around.

After they pass through the Upper Mississippi River, tundra swans head southeast to Chesapeake Bay and North Carolina. Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina estimates 20,000 to 30,000 swans winter there. However, it is near the site of a proposed Navy outlying landing field. The director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the governor of North Carolina, Audubon and several other conservation groups are contesting building at the site, which would see practice take-offs and landings about every 15 minutes and low-altitude flights of the noisy Super Hornet jets.

Estrogen Digestion

It doesn’t take much estrogen in river water to cause reproductive abnormalities in fish. Concentrations as low as a few parts per trillion are responsible for “intersexual” fish, whose gonads contain both ovarian and testicular tissue. After accumulating ample evidence in the United States and Europe about the damage done to fish and the amounts of estrogen responsible, researchers are looking for ways to reduce the estrogen that flows into the river through sewage treatment plants.

Estrogens from the urine and feces of farm and wild animals enter the river in runoff. Estrogen from human urine and feces and from birth control pills and other pharmaceuticals enter the river by way of sewage treatment plant discharge.

In a test of seven conventional sewage treatment plants that use microbial digestive processes to break down waste, researchers discovered that the plants remove 96 percent of the estrogen, but that the remaining four percent was still enough to cause harm.

The solution may be longer sewage treatment times; engineered wetlands that remove trace amounts of pollution; or growing more of a specific strain of microbe that completely degrades the estrogen in just five days. (*Science News*, 3-10-07)

Cleanup Art

Quad Cities — Junk and stuff found in and around the river became the raw materials for sculptures in a project called “Mississippi Palette.”

Twelve artists are leading teams of students to build artworks out of natural and manmade materials collected in river cleanups. Their artworks will be displayed at various sites around the Quad Cities this summer. Some will be placed in permanent locations and others will be exhibited temporarily at the Figge Art Museum in Davenport, starting with an unveiling and artists’ reception on May 25 at the museum and other locations.

No Cover for Nudists

Madison, Wis. — The Mazomanie beach on the Wisconsin River has been a clothes-optional beach for more than 50 years. It has survived many sieges of controversy by careful management by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which established rules, such as nudists cannot be visible from the parking lot and there can be no sexual activity on the beach.

Now after nearly 10 years of active protest by a determined group of local people, the DNR cut down wil-

lows lining the bank, further exposing the exposed.

The willows were removed to reduce alleged sexual activity and provide more sun for nesting turtles, according to the DNR, which is also closing a wooded area next to the beach from April 1 to September 15 to prevent sexual activity from moving there.

Ralph Ovadal, pastor of Pilgrims Covenant Church in nearby Monroe, Wis., who was convicted of disorderly conduct for harassing a sunbather at the beach in 2001, is particularly pleased about the DNR’s decision.

“I do hope the day is not far off when Mazo beach is once again fully restored to its original use as a wildlife area and available for the enjoyment of all the citizens of Wisconsin, rather than being a mecca for individuals who have a desire to parade themselves stark naked on public property in front of children,” Ovadal said. (*La Crosse Tribune*, 3-27-07) ❧

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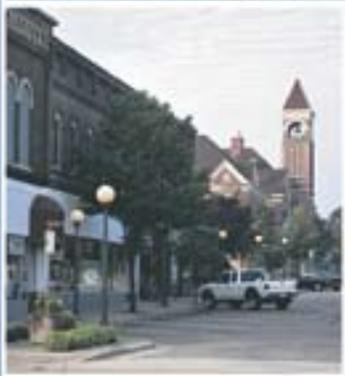
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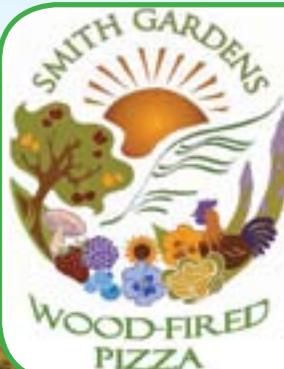
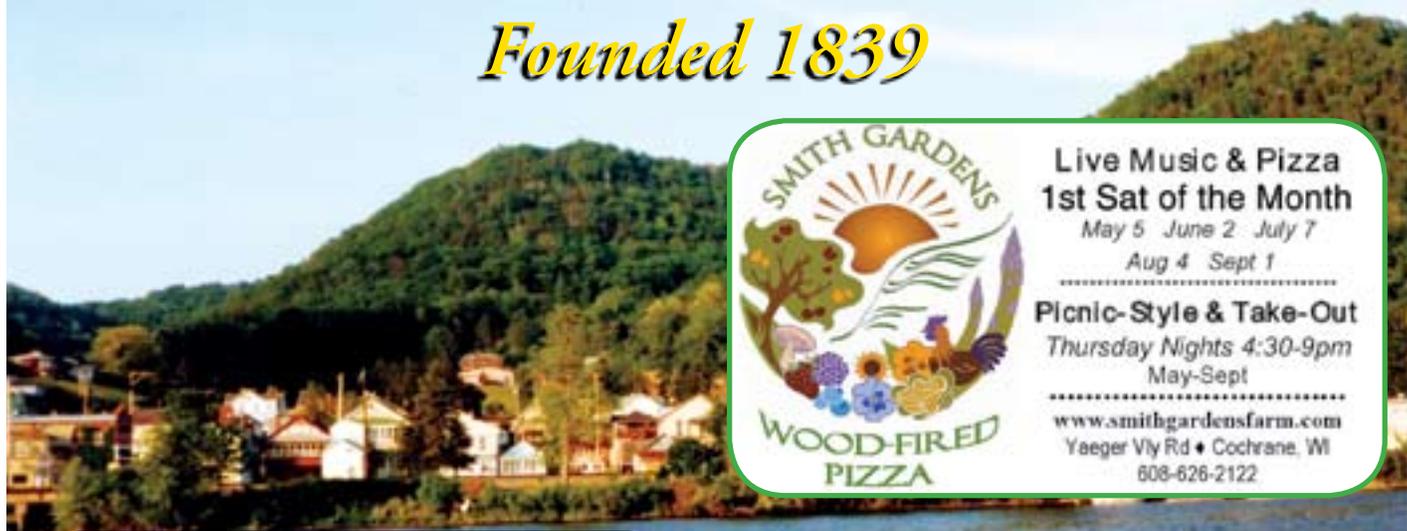
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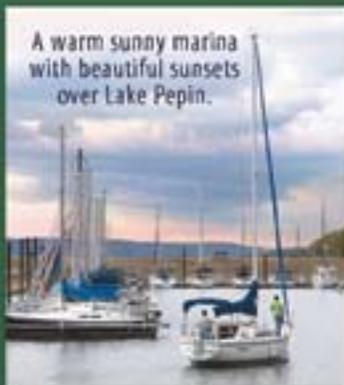
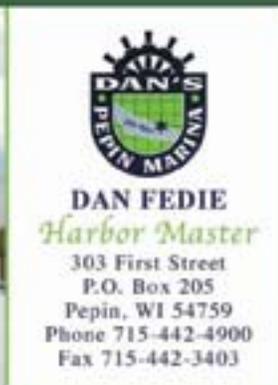


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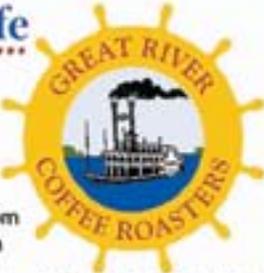

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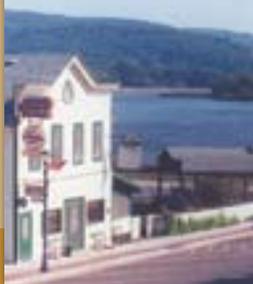
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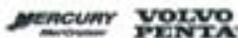
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Army Road: *Wild All the Way Out*

New Albin, Iowa

By Pamela Eyden



Army Road takes you through bottomland forests from New Albin to the New Albin Landing, in the heart of the Reno Bottoms. (detail from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Pool 9 Map)

In spring or early summer, walking the road is an acoustic experience as much as a visual one, especially at twilight. Cranes call from several directions. Geese honk, frogs croak, and unseen ducks paddle quickly away through the reeds, their feet and wings whirring over the water.

Army Road is a two-mile-long, gravel trail out into the Mississippi River floodplains and backwaters. It crosses acres of wetlands, one large slough and many small ones, then threads its way through a floodplain forest, and ends at a parking lot, boat ramp and fishing platform. If you are pulling a boat, the landing is just the beginning of your adventure into Reno Bottoms' maze of backwaters. Otherwise, the landing is not the point — getting to it is most of the fun.

Army Road extends east of the little town of New Albin, Iowa, population 527, which is, literally, a stone's toss from Minnesota. To get to Army Road, turn east off Highway 26, the Great River Road, onto Ross Street in the center of town near the Community Center. Ross Street becomes Elm Street after you zig and zag past the bank. In a few blocks, you'll reach the edge of a plateau overlooking the great wilds of the river floodplain. Next to a big U.S. Fish & Wildlife sign announcing Pool Slough, is a parking area and an overlook with a spotting scope. There's a lot to see here, right from the beginning.

Local people and birders know the road as a great place to spot birds and wildlife, including otter, beaver, deer, turtles, muskrats and frogs. A mother bear and cub were spotted crossing the road two years ago. Tallies show more than 150 bird species were spotted there last year. Sandhill cranes nest in the wetlands adjacent to the road; their bugling calls can be heard for miles. Bald eagles soar overhead, looking for fish; two giant nests are visible from the boat landing. Red-winged blackbirds, prothonotary warblers, kingfishers, herons and geese — the diverse mix of river habitats attracts all the river birds.

Migratory birds flood the area in the fall. But there aren't nearly as many as there once were. Higher water caused by the locks and dams have drowned out places that used to be rich in arrowhead, wild celery, wild rice and other plants that birds depend on for food.

To try and correct that, biologists, birders and engineers joined forces to build dikes to surround 52 acres of wetlands near town on the upstream side of Army Road, with pumps to adjust water levels to encourage

(Army Road continues on page 45)

ESCAPE

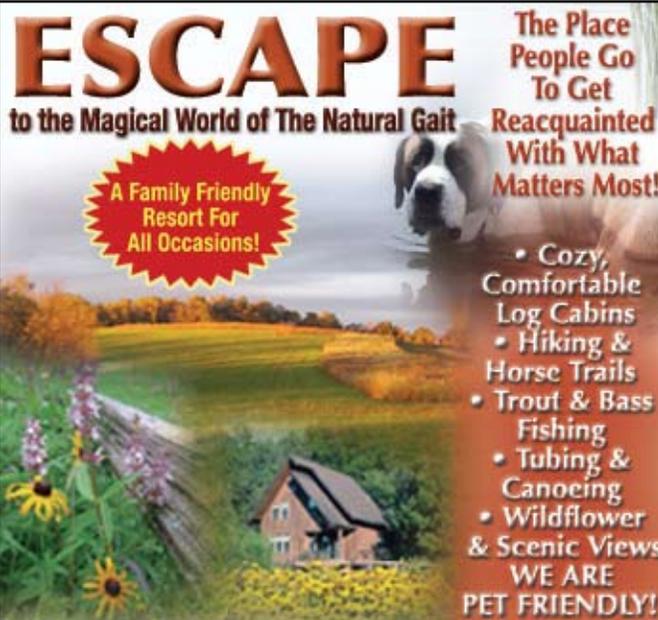
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