

The “Big Muddy”

By Herb Evert

The Mississippi River, or the “Big Muddy” as it is called, runs from just south of our national boundary with Canada to its delta on the Gulf of Mexico. It is truly the waterway of a nation, enabling boat and barge traffic and associated commerce along its entire length. Forming the western border of our fair state of Wisconsin, we are the beneficiaries of its many possibilities and have been since before Wisconsin became a state.

Picturesque towns and quaint villages along the course of this great river offer recreational activities from boating to river cruises for three seasons of the year, from meandering riverside trails to year-round bird watching, from the myriad species in summer and unsurpassed flocks of waterfowl both spring and fall to assemblages of eagles in winter, from sport and commercial fishing to superb hunting and trapping. And the bluffs along its course on both the Iowa/Minnesota and Wisconsin sides are green with summer foliage, aglow with autumn color, and aglisten with winter frost, snow and ice, providing glorious day trips and endless inspiration to photographers and artists.

How fortunate we are to enjoy such resources, and how essential it is that we preserve them!

Wisconsin's "Inside Passage"

By Herb Evert

From earliest times, from our indigenous inhabitants to our earliest foreign explorers to our current citizens, the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers have provided a waterway through the interior of our state. From northeast to southwest — from Lake Michigan at Green Bay to the Mississippi River at Prairie du Chien — for almost 235 miles, this corridor provided a passage through otherwise rugged wilderness, from the pineries of the north through the oak openings of our prairies to the unglaciated hill country of our southwest. Few states can claim such an "inside passage", and perhaps no state has made better use of it.

With one short overland exception, a portage at — where else? — present-day Portage, Wisconsin. The earliest inhabitants of our future state had a means of exploration and commerce from the Great Lakes to our greatest river, and from thence to the Gulf of Mexico.

Today the two links of this passage are sources of endless pleasures: from swimming to boating, to fishing, to camping on sandbars or at riverside campgrounds, to hunting and trapping and wilderness trekking. How rich a legacy is ours. How rich and diverse an ecosystem. And how crucial our stewardship of this heritage.