

*Rendezvous!*

## PRAIRIE DU CHIEN AND CRAWFORD COUNTY

The traveler who has opted to follow the river road between Ferryville and Prairie du Chien will be well rewarded as a good portion of the route is etched into bluffsides which plunge directly into the river. Often, there seems to be barely enough room for both *STH 35* and the railroad to cling to the cascading river bluffs.

Crawford County has a total of 60 miles of river borders, including the historic *Wisconsin River* along its southern edge. A third major river, the *Kickapoo*, continues its meanderings from Vernon County to finally join the Wisconsin in the village of Wauzeka on *STH 60*. Although this most crooked river provides 100 miles of scenic canoeing, its total length is only about 33 linear miles. Its Indian name, *Kwigapawa*, means “it moves about here and there.”

There are several scenic drives accessible from the Great River Road. *STH 27* from Prairie du Chien north through Eastman to *Gays Mills* is a skyline drive that gradually drops into the Kickapoo River Valley where, in season, thousands of blooming apple trees decorate the hillsides.

*STH 131* north of Wauzeka follows the Kickapoo River to the Vernon County border and the solar village of *Soldier's Grove*. The town has been rebuilt above the flood plain of the Kickapoo and has incorporated solar energy construction into all the new commercial buildings. Gays Mills and Soldiers Grove are also easily visited by following *STH 171* from the Great River Road just south of Ferryville.

The Great River itself takes on the maze-like appearance of pre-lock and dam days, dissected into channels and sloughs, islands and backwaters, and occasional broad stretches of grassy prairie.

The contrast between the broad pool just north of the dam and the bayoux below the dam are typical of the 'pool' structure imposed upon the river by the lock and dam system. Typically, there will be the narrow main channel just below the dam, gradually broadening out and dissected by numerous side channels and wooded islands. A large lake-like pool forms just above each dam.

The town of *Prairie du Chien*, is the oldest town on the Upper Mississippi River and has done much to preserve its historical past. The State Historical Society operates the elegantly restored *Villa Louis mansion*, erected by Hercules Dousman of John Astor's American Fur Company.

CR-4

FISHERMAN PARKING (*STH 82* just east of main channel bridge). Not located on water. Picnic table • grill

**TOUR ROUTE: SOUTH OF LANSING BRIDGE,  
FERRYVILLE TO PRAIRIE DU CHIEN**

**Ferryville 5 miles • Prairie du Chien 28 miles**

RUSH CREEK PUBLIC HUNTING AREA - 1700 acres just north of Ferryville are open for public duck and deer hunting and fur trapping. In recent years, buck and doe hunting have been allowed throughout the nine-day deer season.

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## FERRYVILLE, WISCONSIN

If this were Europe, Ferryville would be one of those tiny little burgs that are fondly remembered because you 'really got to meet the people.' The Wooden Nickel Saloon (formerly the Rattle Inn), the Swing Inn, the Grandview Motel and Neome's Motel all cling to the edge of the bluff within spittin' distance of a broad blue expanse of the Mississippi River. There's not much else to do of an evening, but chat — that is unless you hunt and fish, or enjoy boating, hiking, or photography. And of course, there are freshly made cheese curds and lightly fried catfish cheeks to be enjoyed.

Originally called *Humblebush* by its largely Norwegian settlers, the village gradually assumed the name applied to it by area farmers and commercial fishermen who gathered here to ferry their goods over to Lansing, IA, where the main fish and grain markets were located. Its tight quarters have qualified Ferryville for the Guinness Book of Records as the longest town with only a single street.

The bluffs behind the village of Ferryville are reputed to be prime rattlesnake territory. The Swing Inn has the skin of a 54" rattler on display and George, down at the Wooden Nickel Saloon, has plenty of tales to spin about close calls with his infamous neighbors, though he is quick to point out that only about ten snakes are ever seen in the area each year.

The most common rattler along the Mississippi is the *Timber rattler*, although the smaller endangered Swamp or *Massasauga rattler* can be found in wet bottomlands further north along the river. (Massasauga is a name taken from an Indian tribe found in Ontario, Canada.) In addition, the western portions of both Vernon and Crawford counties contain the only known breeding populations of *Diamondback rattlers* found east of the Mississippi. These are thought to have escaped from a circus traveling through the area near the turn of the century.

George could probably qualify as the most interesting chat in town. He has long been a licensed hunting and fishing guide. He was a snake hunter when it was still legal and he has trapped coyote, mink, fox and turtles. As everyone will tell you in these parts, the duck, turkey and deer hunting is phenomenal. It is still possible to see as many as a million ducks (local estimate) take flight and fill the sky like a swarm of gigantic insects.

#### CR-5

FERRYVILLE LANDING (located in village of Ferryville below the Cheese Factory). Newly-surfaced, \$1 honor system launch fee.

*Sugar Creek Park* and baseball diamond is located at the south end of the village. Camping is allowed at no charge. New restrooms • water • no electricity

#### CR-6

PICNIC AREA (northeast corner of *STH 35* and *171*.) Small wayside with one table and grill.

#### CR-7

LARSON'S BLUFF OVERLOOK. Approximately 2 miles north of Lynxville. Follow Kettle Hollow, a gravel road, left off the Great River Road just south of CR-6. Stay to the left all the way, through a farmer's yard and continue on for another mile, plus. The view, from Lansing, IA, to the Lynxville Lock & Dam, is well worth the trouble. However, it is not well maintained or fenced. One step too far and you are **in** the Mississippi. *Indian burial mounds have been located in the vicinity, some of which are visible in the valley from Kettle Hollow road.*

CR-8

WAYSIDE (1-1/2 miles north of Lynxville). Picnic table.

CR-9

COLD SPRINGS LANDING (1 1/4 miles north of Lynxville at mouth of Cold Springs). Surfaced boat ramp. Picnic area. No water. Excellent blue gill fishing at the lower lake and near the bridge in the fall.

*CR 6 — CR 11*

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## LYNXVILLE, WISCONSIN

(pop. 194)

The old railway depot is gone now, but the name remains on the boat ramp as a reminder of the days when the town numbered 2000 people. Lynxville was the major rail shipping depot in the area. Iowa farmers ferried their goods to this Wisconsin marketplace from Harpers Ferry, across the river.

A few bars, a pet corner, gas and groceries, and the local cafe along the Great River Road constitute the commercial district of this fading township. Numerous empty buildings dating from the late 19th century stare blankly out of their wooded bluffside sites — ripe, perhaps, for adoption by an enterprising artist. The old church is now an interesting collector's Antique Shop located east of Withey's Bar.

### **A Brief History of Lynxville**

Kevin Withey is the third generation to operate the family business which began in 1908. His stories revolve around the memories of his enterprising grandfather, who was a commercial fisherman and '*market hunter*.' The market hunters were specially licensed to harvest ducks and other wildlife from the river. Their weapons were called 'punt guns' and were mounted right on the boats. They were much larger than modern guns (his grandfather's was a 4-gauge) and were loaded with anything available: shingle nails, gravel, nuts, or bolts.

The hunters might bring in their boats loaded to the water level with 500-1000 ducks. These were cleaned, packed

with ice in barrels and shipped to Chicago on the train. Hunters received about 10 cents per duck.

The bulk of the population lived and farmed on numerous islands that were flooded when the lock & dams were built. The islands were heavily timbered, and along with area bluffs, provided huge rafts of lumber that were shipped south from Lynxville in the first half of this century. The demand for lumber was tremendous at this time and the dollar value of lumber to the Upper Mississippi was ultimately six times the value of the lead ore which first prompted settlement south of Cassville, WI.

Today, Lynxville (like Harpers Ferry) is largely a summer and retirement community.

~~RIVER HILLS ESTATES CAMPING~~ Very quiet, tidy RV camp with full hook-ups available. Just south of village, overlooking backwater. No showers.

#### CR-11

LYNXVILLE BOAT HARBOR (along *STH* 35 in village). Main channel is accessible to small boats via channel from harbor under highway and railroad. Private operator. Fishing boat rentals.

#### CR-12

WAYSIDE AND HISTORICAL MARKER (east side of *STH* 35). Shelter and scenic river view. Marker commemorates log rafting on the Mississippi. Picnic tables • grills • water • toilets

#### CR-13

LOCK & DAM #9. Visitor overlook to observe lock operations. Privately operated fishing float on Iowa side is accessible



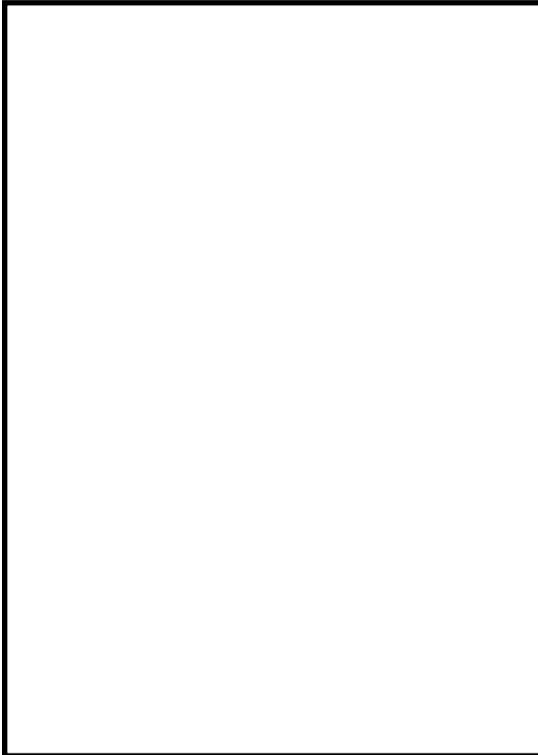
via ferry from Wisconsin shore. Picnic sites • toilets • water

CR-14

GORDON'S BAY LANDING. Hard surface boat landing. Picnic area • no water

CR-15

AMBRO SLOUGH PUBLIC ACCESS. (located on town road west of *STH 35*). Non-surfaced ramp. Access to Mississippi



*Very often area farmers would simply turn their cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and other domestic animals out to graze on islands and bluffs for the summer. On occasion, animals would avoid the fall roundups and gradually become quite wild and vicious, as was the pig in this photo. The photo and article are courtesy of the Area Research Center, UW-La Crosse.*

From the **LA CROSSE TRIBUNE and LEADER Press**  
January 16, 1927

A wild and vicious boar of almost prehistoric size and weight, which for ten years has successfully eluded all attempts at capture and which has succeeded in keeping beyond the reach of the shells of scores of hunters, was finally shot and killed in the bottom lands below Lynxville early Thursday morning by Percy Eagon, Oakland Street, La Crosse.

The estimated weight of the animal was between 850 and 900 pounds. It was 8 feet 8 inches in length, had tusks nearly 10 inches long, and had the general build of a deer, being tall and narrow. The hunter indicated it had almost no fat and that the bristles were so wiry that it was impossible to remove them from the hide.

Farmers living in the vicinity declare that it has lived on the island opposite Lynxville for ten years or more. It was of a very vicious nature and on several occasions had treed hunters who have tried to kill it. Mr. Eagon himself has tried to kill it for a number of years, and has perched in a tree for hours at a time waiting for the animal to move on.

Eagon made the trip to the bottoms early Thursday morning with Adolph Wick and John Bridel, vowing not to come back until he had it. Within 15 minutes after their arrival, Eagon sighted it and sent a bullet into its body. The boar got to its feet and staggered into the woods but was halted by a round of shots from Bridel.

The old tusker is believed to have been the unusual offspring of escaped domestic hogs, of which there are hundreds living wild in the Winnesheik. Some of them have attained large size, but Eagon's victim is by far the largest ever known hereabouts.

In the belief that the animal may have had a mate, Frank Mader, Jacob Newberg, Ted Hanson and Matt Becker left for the bottoms this morning to hunt.

## PRAIRIE DU CHIEN, WISCONSIN

Prairie du Chien, perched north of the confluence of the Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers, had its beginnings at about the same time that New York City was a struggling settlement on the east coast. It is Wisconsin's second oldest town (Green Bay is the oldest) and is the only site of a battle in the mid-west during the War of 1812. It maintains a fairly staunch French contingent, with Bastille Day still celebrated in July. Translated from the French, its name means *Dog Plains*. The reason for the name is not clear though it may have referred to an Indian chief or family with the name 'Dog.'

*The French Cemetery* is located on the north end of town, near *THE BARN RESTAURANT* and the *SPORTS UNLIMITED CAMPGROUND*. There are 137 campsites and a pool at this resort-like complex. Sanitary dump • electricity • sewerage sites

### Points of Interest

The first stop in the historic city of Prairie du Chien should be the *Wisconsin State Tourist Information Center* on *USH 18* at the foot of the bridge over the Main Channel.

#### CR-17

PRAIRIE DU CHIEN MARINA (On St. Feriole Island—north of Washington St. Bridge within city limits). Hard surface ramp. 80 boat slips. Rental boats and houseboats. Marina services include gas, oil, repairs, toilets, and water.

#### CR-18

LA RIVIERE PARK (east side of *USH 18*, approximately one mile east of Prairie du Chien airport). Extensive city-owned open space. No formal picnic sites, no water or toilets.

#### CR-19

ST. FERIOLE ISLAND HISTORICAL AREA. Follow Blackhawk Avenue west to *Villa Louis*, built by the Dousman family. Today, the mansion is operated by the Wisconsin State Historical Society and is considered to be one of the finest Victorian restorations in the country. Tours daily, May 1 through October 31. Small admission fee. Its extensive grounds are open to visitors with no charge.

*The Prairie Villa Rendezvous, held annually during the Father's Day weekend on St. Feriole Island, is considered by modern Buckskinners to be one of the finest gatherings in the nation. Visitors can stroll around in bluejeans, tasting fried Indian breads, bartering for a bone-handled knife, touring (with permission) a voyageur's teepee or canoe campsite. No modern utensils, furnishings, or clothing are allowed for the purists in a buckskinner camp, and colorful, often scanty, Indian and frontier leather (buckskin) is the norm for participants.*

Other buildings associated with the fur trade which are open to the public include the Fur Trade Museum, the Old Dousman Hotel, picnic sites and a visitor center. Local signs direct the visitor to other historic structures and museums which are scattered throughout the city.

The old *Fort Crawford Medical Museum and Military Hospital* is located south of the State Tourist Information Center. It houses a restored pharmacy and exhibits which explain early medical/dental practices. The Military Hospital is best known for the pioneering studies of Dr. William Beaumont into the workings of the human digestive system in the 1830's. The Medical Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from May 1 through October 31. Small admission fee.

The *St. Feriole Island Railroad* is located behind the Villa Grounds, along the Mississippi River banks. The restored rail cars house an assortment of shops and eateries. Visitors will enjoy relaxing on the boardwalk.

#### CR-20

LAWLER PARK (On St. Feriole Island). Water Street runs along the Mississippi and behind Villa Louis. Lawler City Park stretches along the river side of the street. A city beach, boat landing and the excursion paddleboat, *Prairie Bell*, are located in the park. Picnic area • riverfront walks • swimming • playground • toilets • water

CR-21

LOCKWOOD AVENUE BOAT LAUNCH (at foot of Lockwood Avenue in city). Hard surfaced ramps.

Blackhawk Avenue East takes one through the city's business district and onto Wisconsin's Great River Road, *STH 35*. Several larger shopping centers, supper clubs, and gas stations are located along *STH 35*.

*PRAIRIE CAMPER SALES AND SERVICE* is located on *STH 35* at the south end of town carries RV supplies.

*BIG RIVER CAMPING* off *STH 35*, south of town, near the Wal-Mart shopping center. Camping in a field along the water (and the railroad track) with electricity, full hook-ups.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

F A T H -  
E R ' ' S  
Weekend

Prairie du Chien, Annual *Prairie Villa Rendezvous*. Visitors are invited to visit Buckskinner Camp held on Villa Louis grounds. Participants live, eat, sleep in style of the 1800-1850 fur traders. No charge to visitors.

Early  
SEPTEMBER

Prairie du Chien, Villa Louis grounds. *Carriage Classic*. Antique carriage display, trotting horse show, parade, demonstrations.

Mid-  
DECEMBER

Victorian Christmas, Villa Louis.

**Follow *STH 35* south from Prairie du Chien toward  
Cassville and Wyalusing State Park.  
Stonefield Village 28 miles . Cassville 30 miles**

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**FUR TRADING IN PRAIRIE DU CHIEN  
(AFTER 1800)**

adapted from the book **Prairie du Chien** by Peter Scanlon

The first fur trading along the Upper Mississippi was probably practiced by renegade Frenchmen in the late 1500's. Duluth and Radisson in 1654 were among the earliest official emissaries of the fur trade. Radisson left the French ranks and became a charter founder of the Hudson Bay Fur Company in the 1670's.

Both licensed and unlicensed traders ("couriers du bois" or free trappers) soon became wealthy — Duluth retired to live in luxury in Montreal after 10 years of fur trading. The illegal trappers sold many of their pelts to Spanish buyers in Louisiana, with beaver by far the most abundant pelt.

By 1810, over 6000 French Canadians worked for Hudson Bay and the Mackinac Fur companies in the upper midwest. By 1825, over a quarter million dollars in fur was sold each year in Montreal, two thirds of which came from the

and boast of exploits in the wilderness.

In October 1824 the American Fur Co. in New York City had the greatest quantity of furs ever offered at auction. There were 12,500 lbs. of beaver pelts, 120,000 lbs. of muskrat pelts, 72,000 racoon pelts, and 10,000 buffalo robes. In 1827, John Jacob Astor sold partly by auction and partly by private sale 550,000 muskrat skins at an average of 36 cents apiece.

Astor's son once estimated the annual income of the company as \$500,000. It's been estimated that in 10 years of business at St. Louis, the Astor company (American Fur) made more than one million dollars. In all, the fur business netted Astor between one and two million dollars.

Hercules Dousman arrived in Prairie du Chien as an agent of the company in 1826. In 1834 he became a significant owner in the American Fur Company, supplying traders established along the northern length of the river. Many of today's river towns are located at Dousman's supply points. Dousman reinvested much of his profits into the midwest, while Astor's profits went to New York.

The transplanting of the Indians after the Black Hawk War, and their final removal in 1848 brought the local fur trade to an end. When furs became scarce in Prairie du Chien, northern Minnesota became the next center of fur trading. In 1848, Dousman and his partner sold out to Henry Hastings Sibley in St. Paul and ended the company's presence in Prairie du Chien. Four years later the area's first millionaire died.

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