

Down the



Oasis in the desert keeps business afloat

About a month after her husband died, Beryl Kuhre is busy with what she and Loring had been doing together for 15 years on the Niobrara River: renting canoes out to those seeking a closer look at what she calls "an oasis in a desert."

"It's real lonesome, but I'm doing OK," said Kuhre, who lives about 200 feet from the shore of the Niobrara River near Valentine.

Kuhre, 54, has 36 canoes she rents out for \$35 a piece, which includes car shuttle and campsite. Although she raises some hogs, she said she makes most of her living from the camping-hiking-and-canoe-rental business. Business has picked up over the years, she said, so she plans to buy about 14 more canoes.

This canoe trip begins at Cornell Bridge near Valentine and ends about 25 miles downriver at the Narrows, or three miles farther down at her place, called Fairfield Campground.

"Canoeing is for people of all walks of life," Kuhre said. It's simple to do and inexpensive for a weekend vacation.

The river is not rough, she said, so "you can take your time and enjoy the ride and the river's beauty."

Kuhre said she probably serves between 600 to 700 people during each of the busy months, June, July and August.

About seven outfitters rent out canoes on the Niobrara, she said.

"I'm probably the smallest (out-fitter) on the river," she said. "They all do more business than me, so you know there's a lot of people who love this river."

Kuhre said she has customers

who started renting from her when business began 15 years ago, and still come back every year.

Helping her this summer were son Doug, Becky Assorsson, son-in-law Clinton Assorsson, Gordon Warrick, Kathy Jackson, Glenda Edwards — all of whom she called "a great bunch of people to work with."

Weekends during the summer are busiest, she said. Canoeers see not only various kinds of shrubs, trees and waterfowl along the river, but waterfalls as well, she said. In particular, about 400 yards from the river one can see Smith Falls, which drops 85 feet.

"Smith Falls is tucked back behind cedars, maples and ash trees," she said. "It's very pretty. Sometimes I walk back there to sit. I like to see the expression in the people's faces when they see it."

Kuhre's husband, Loring, died Aug. 10. It was a sunny day, she said, and he and she had shared a good time together that morning. About noon he told her she had been working too hard so she should go home for awhile. She left while he was loading canoes.

"He was always looking out for me," she said.

As Loring was loading a canoe, she said, he had a coronary arrest and died.

The last site he saw was the Niobrara River, she said.

"I know he loved the river and I know he loved me, too," Kuhre said. She said Wednesday would have been their 37th wedding anniversary.

Kuhre said she knows that Loring would want her to continue with the canoeing business.



Kuhre

I want to go on and keep our place open and serve the people," she said.

Loring was buried in Ainsworth on Aug. 13. At his burial this poem called "Niobrara" by Michael O'Leary was read:

Where tableland and sandhills meet,
Quick weed of river at their feet,
Two canoeists held their stroke,
And listened while the river spoke:
"Ten thousand years I've hearn this course,
Through Rosebud clay, past fossil horse,
To Trapper French, the water that runs;
It's from my work this Valley comes.
Here the banks that touch my speed,
For ancient catfish swirls to feed,
And here the rocks for mink to hide,
For little bluestem terrace wide,
My springbranch streams are gravelled coal,
And speckled trout has grass — draped pool.

A stream for stickleback and dace,
Where birch and ponderosa face,
Here snipe and rail have reedy marsh,
Bald eagles roost through winter harsh,
The lanky heron perch to rest,
And scolding wren a rush for nest,
Where moss and cress find shady seep,
And sandhill springs make sudden leap,
Where beaver builds his mud-branch house,
And kestrel dives on harvest mouse,
Here southward good and crane have pause,
The whitetail deer wood-sheltered draws,
An oxbow for the tussocked sedge,
For culture black a stoney ledge,
Where bull snake suns on sandy road,
And squats the burrowed spadefoot toad,
And where on bottomland is found,
The thieving wood rat's stick built mound,
All this I've wrought in passing years,
With scouring flow these turning years."
Then in the Canyon's sun-low shade,
They dipped aga in their weathered blades,
Fresh strokes towards camp on river's shore,
It lives to run ten thousand more.