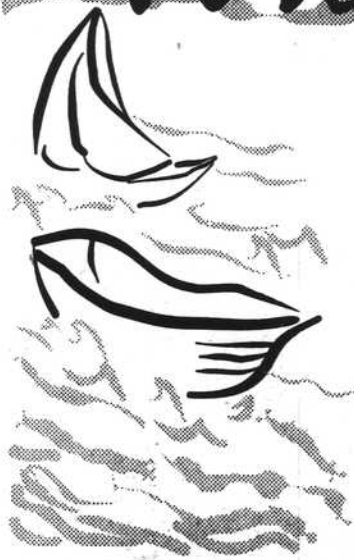


Missouri Meanderings



Fascinating people, places mark journey along river

If you are careful and pay attention, the everyday magic of places and faces along Nebraska's Missouri River unfolds. Sleepy valley villages ducking cottonwoods connect with bustling towns and trusting people.

These are the sights and sounds of an often unnoticed Nebraska, and the Missouri is their companion.

Eleven miles downstream from the Santee Indian Reservation, Gavins Point Dam stretches across the Missouri, connecting Nebraska and South Dakota.

The roar of 275,000 cubic feet of water spilling every second through the dam's 14 tainter gates serves as the mid-morning mantra of an eager fisherman.

With his 15-foot rod and 40-pound test line, Seng Inthamone reels in a 14-inch carp. While the Omaha resident has fished the spot for years, his luck Saturday is nominal, he says, pitching the fish back into the spillway.

With a chunk of catfish from an earlier snare, Inthamone hopes to bait a better catch. For now, the trick isn't working.

"It's a carp. I've got to let him go."

Every gambler knows

Up the road and across the dam, Warren and Donna Schomburg bid goodbye to a weeklong road adventure taking them through Illinois, Minnesota, South Dakota and, finally, back to Gavins Point Dam, one of Warren Schomburg's favorite spots.

The Shelton couple, both in their 60s, are high off Warren Schomburg's slot winnings the night before at Ft. Randall Casino, 71 miles into South Dakota.

"I won enough money to pay for my day," Warren Schomburg says, the triumphant telling barely audible over the rolling river 35 feet below.

"We're becoming river rats."

On the road

Highways connecting hamlets near the Missouri are the countryside's main currents, bypassing eddies of community activity. Sunflowers pop up as rogues in fields of corn and beans. Locusts near the road sing the harmonies of Indian summer song over the drone of locusts farther away.

And the band plays on.

In Obert, population 35, rustic is the rule. Of the 57 double-hung windows in the former Obert Public School, 17 are busted. Strewn loveseats and closets of corduroy and blue jeans betray the long-lost secret of the building's former use — as a home.

Bees buzz atop goldenrods sneaking through the crumbling sidewalks in front.

Flights of fancy

Heading down Nebraska Highway 12 and U.S. Highway 20, travelers encounter South Sioux City. After an odorous introduction to the municipal sewage treatment plant, a family-owned airstrip presents itself on the plain.

J.P. Martin is among the third generation of Martins to work the place, where Grandpa Tommie's 1939 Piper Cub is the pride and joy. According to the Piper company, the two-seater is the longest singly-owned Piper held by the same family anywhere in the world, Martin says following a flight in the plane.

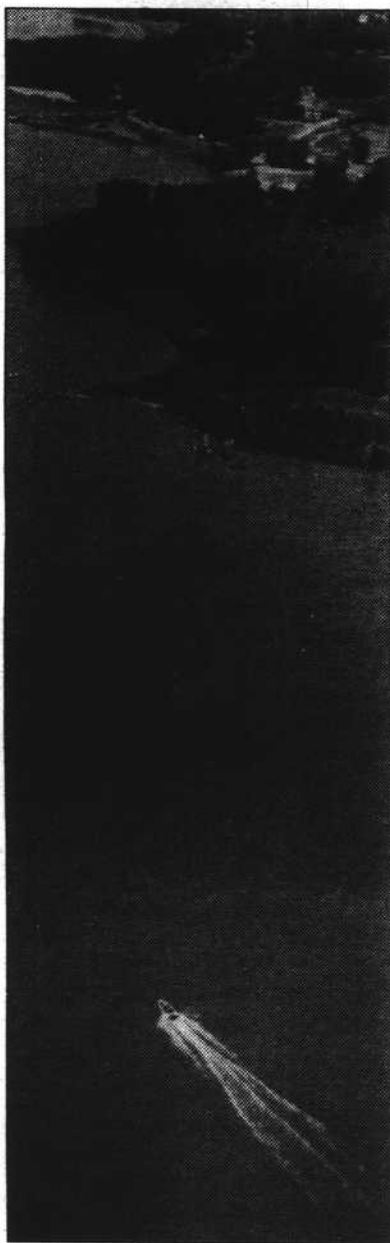
"It's been the company's bread and butter for a long time. I'm pretty lucky. I get to fly just about everything God and man invented."

His favorite flyer is a German-built Schleiker K-7 glider owned by



Story by Jim Goodwin
Photos by Dan Luedert

Please see RIVER on 14



Clockwise from above:
A LONE BOATER navigates the mighty Missouri River west of South Sioux City. The river runs along Nebraska's eastern border.
OMAHA RESIDENT SENG INTHAMONE tosses a carp back into the spillway at Gavins Point Dam east of Lewis and Clark Lake on the Nebraska-South Dakota border. Inthamone was hoping he landed a catfish.
THE FORMER OBERT PUBLIC SCHOOL sits silent at the corner of Second and Miller streets. Corrugated plastic and chipboard cover some of the brick building's broken windows.
DAVE, A 6-YEAR-OLD Macy resident, tries to separate Sheba and Smokey, two copulating neighborhood dogs.