

ASHLEY POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 688.8 AHP, Map 17
Right bank, descending

During the past century, the Lower Mississippi has made some drastic changes in the Ashley Point area. Most of these changes came about directly or indirectly as a result of the Commerce Cutoff in 1874. The cutoff had caused Ashley Point to recede, and the same year the river abandoned Old Walnut Bend and started flowing through Bordeaux Chute. It then began a slow southeasterly slide that carried its main channel into the course it now follows at Mhoon Bend.

River pilots were probably happy to see the last of Old Walnut Bend. It had been a snaggy passage and was strewn with the wrecks of unfortunate steamers.

MHOON LANDING, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 687.6 AHP, Map 17
Left bank, descending

A river gage and a bulletin board for the convenience of navigators is maintained at Mhoon Landing. Both the landing and the bend are named for a Delta plantation owner whose land lay on the east bank in the bend.

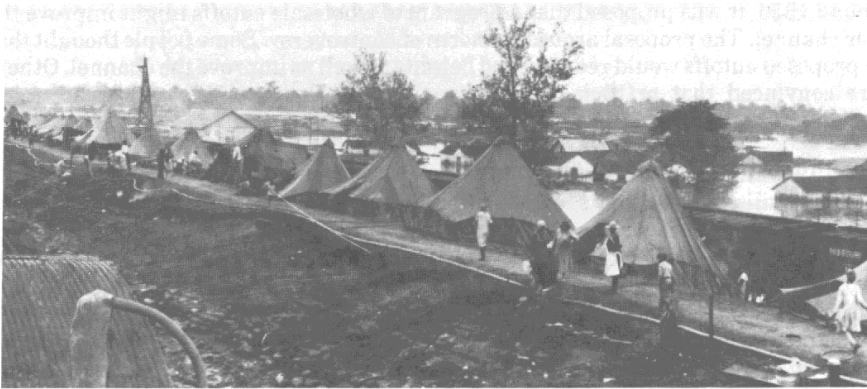
The Mississippi shore in Mhoon Bend is protected by a very long concrete revetment that protects the bank and keeps the river from continuing to move eastward.

WHITEHALL CREVASSE

Mile 680.4 AHP, Map 17
Right bank, descending

Herbert Hoover, who was the U. S. Secretary of Commerce at the time, declared that the great flood of 1927 was "the worst peace-time disaster in the history of the nation." Hoover meant exactly what he said. He had been in the flooded areas personally directing the relief work, and he had first-hand knowledge of the human suffering and widespread destruction that the great flood had caused.

Levees in 1927 had been designed to contain a flood only slightly greater than the previous record flood of 1913. Even if the great flood in 1927 had not broken through the levee system, it would have overtopped the levees by four to five feet.



FLOOD OF 1927. The flood of 1927 was a superflood that caused a heavy loss of life and property. Hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their homes and live in refugee camps for the duration of the record-breaking high water. There were 13 major crevasses in the levee system. The above photograph shows tents erected on a levee near Arkansas City, Arkansas, to house refugees whose homes were inundated by the great flood.

The rampaging Mississippi broke through at Whitehall on April 15, and the gap enlarged rapidly until it was 2,400 feet wide. The St. Francis River flows within a mile of the Lower Mississippi in the vicinity of Whitehall, and the great crevasse very nearly allowed the two rivers to come together in a new confluence many miles above the normal mouth of the little tributary.

The Whitehall crevasse occurred so unexpectedly that many people living in the area affected had to take refuge in trees and on housetops. Some of them had to wait several days on their uncomfortable perches for rescue.

There were 13 major crevasses in 1927, and official reports estimated that 330,000 persons had to be rescued from trees and housetops. Before the flood had ended, 700,000 people had to leave their homes.

HARDIN CUTOFF

Mile 678.0 AHP, Map 18

Before the Army Corps of Engineers undertook its project to stabilize the channel of the alluvial Lower Mississippi, the river had a lamentable tendency to lengthen its meander loops and then to lop them off by cutting a new channel across the narrow necks of the bends. These natural cutoffs were mixed blessings. Sometimes they cut miles off the navigation channel, but just as often they created new problems and made the channel more difficult than before.

Around 1850, it was proposed that a program of wholesale cutoffs might improve the river channel. The proposal aroused a storm of controversy. Some people thought that the proposed cutoffs would reduce flood heights as well as improve the channel. Others were convinced that artificial cutoffs would raise flood heights and create more problems than they could possibly solve.

Before 1900 the arguments were almost purely academic, since neither the tools and technical skills, nor the funds, were available for such a project. After the turn of the century, the development of new equipment and the availability of Federal funds for river projects caused a serious study to be made of the cutoff question. In 1933, the Corps of Engineers embarked on the project that eventually resulted in 13 artificial cutoffs between Memphis and Baton Rouge. The cutoff at Hardin Point, constructed in 1942, was the last of the series.

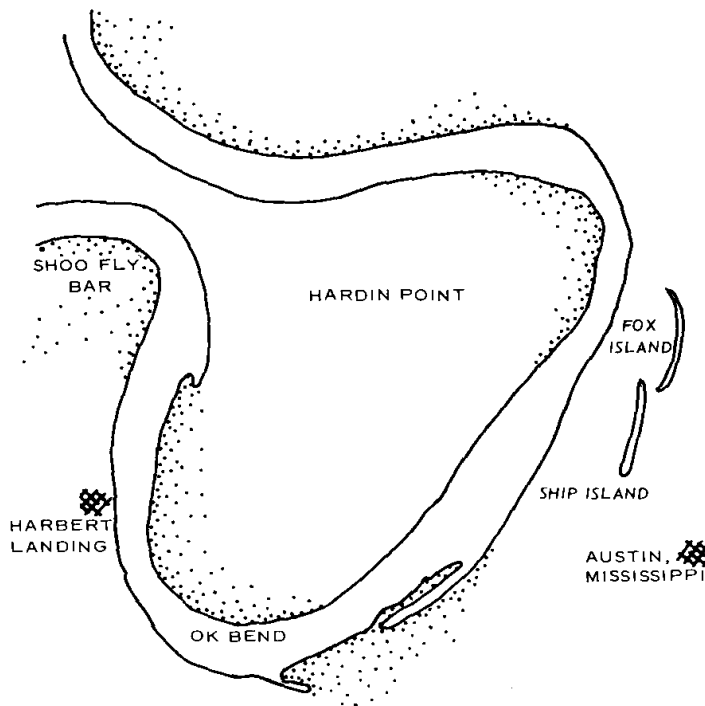
Hardin Cutoff shortened the navigation channel of the Lower Mississippi by several miles, and removed from the river a meander loop that had long been known as "OK Bend." The cutoff was constructed during the low water season of 1941-1942, and the last plug of earth was blown out on March 18, 1942. The new channel developed very rapidly. It was lighted for navigation on May 27 of the same year, and by June 30 towboats were navigating it in both directions without difficulty. In August the navigation lights were removed from OK Bend and Hardin Cutoff became the new permanent channel of the Lower Mississippi.

Several islands and the little town of Austin, Mississippi, were removed from the main channel of the river by the cutoff. One of the islands that was left lying miles inland was the one that lay near the town. It had been called Ship Island, and somewhere near its foot lay the remains of a well-known steamer called the *Pennsylvania*.

The *Pennsylvania* was lost near Austin during the great flood of 1858. The boat had been hurrying upstream in June of that year, and had passed Austin just before dawn. There was a woodyard above the town, and George C. Harrison happened to be out on the river bank stacking cordwood when the big steamer passed. Harrison stopped his work to watch the boat round the bend above him. Suddenly the *Pennsylvania* seemed to disintegrate before his astonished eyes. A fraction of a second later, a tremendous blast shook the earth, and Harrison knew what had happened. When the smoke cleared he could see that the *Pennsylvania* was already a total wreck.

Peering through the smoke and fog that still hung over the river, Harrison thought he could see people in the water, struggling to stay afloat and clutching at bits of debris. Young Harrison shouted to his father, and the two men quickly untied a woodflat and rushed to the disabled steamer as fast as they could row the awkward craft.

At the scene of the accident, there was wild confusion. Dozens of people were in the water, but many were still on board the disabled boat. To George Harrison's dismay, some of the passengers seemed to be more concerned about their property than their lives. Not until it became obvious that the *Pennsylvania* was being rapidly consumed by flames were the Harrisons able to persuade some of the people to abandon their luggage and jump to the safety of the woodflat. A few hesitated long enough to grab their heavy trunks, tossing them to the woodboat's deck and injuring several people in the process.



HARDIN POINT BEFORE CUTOFF. A navigation map published by the Corps of Engineers in 1941 shows the long meander loop that was removed when Hardin Cutoff was constructed the following year. Austin, Mississippi, had long since lost its waterfront and both Fox Island and Ship Island had attached themselves to the Mississippi shore in front of the town. Colonel Charles Suter's map of 1874 shows the old river landings that were on the point and the east bank in 1874.

The Harrisons kept their flatboat against the burning vessel until it too was about to be engulfed in the flames. Then they pulled away and drifted down to a safe place to attend to the injured and await assistance. The wreck of the burning *Pennsylvania* drifted past Austin and came to rest at the foot of Ship Island.

An investigation made after the accident revealed that the big boat had been carrying about 400 passengers when she exploded. About 160 of the passengers and crew were lost. Many of the dead were German immigrants.

One of the victims of the explosion died several hours after he had been taken to a hospital at Memphis. His name was Henry Clemens. Henry had been the boat's clerk, and his brother Sam was a cub pilot on the *Pennsylvania*. But for a last minute change of plans at New Orleans, Sam Clemens would have been sharing Henry's quarters at the time of the accident and might have shared his sad fate as well. If Sam Clemens

had not been left behind at New Orleans when the *Pennsylvania* made her last ill-fated upstream voyage, the world might have been deprived of one of its favorite authors. Young Sam Clemens would later abandon his career as a steamboat pilot to become America's most respected and beloved literary figure, Mark Twain.

The *Pennsylvania* was not the only steamer whose remains lay somewhere in OK Bend. Another interesting relic of the steamboat days lay off Hardin's Landing.

The Confederate gunboat *Tuscarora* was hurrying up to help defend Columbus, Kentucky, when she caught fire in front of the landing and went down. The crew of the rebel boat ran her to shore, and tried to remove the powder from her magazine, but the fire progressed too rapidly. When the flames reached the *Tuscarora's* store of ammunition, exploding shells zoomed into the nearby woods, catching trees on fire and burning down the plantation slave quarters on the shore. The boat, which carried three guns, went down about 30 yards from the river bank, and was said to have been still visible at low water in 1870.

On January 16, 1871, the steamboat *T. L. McGill* went aground at Shoo Fly Bar and caught fire. High winds fanned the flames and the boat's 115 passengers had to jump for their lives. About 75 people lost their lives in the accident.

ST. FRANCIS RIVER

Mile 672.3 AHP, Map 18
Right bank, descending

The St. Francis River rises in the rugged Ozark hills of southeastern Missouri, and flows in a southeasterly direction for 475 miles to join the Lower Mississippi a few miles above Helena, Arkansas. With its tributaries, the St. Francis drains an area of about 8,400 square miles.

Traders and settlers who were living near the mouth of the St. Francis around 1820 said that the little tributary of the Mississippi was a navigable stream and that keelboats often travelled 400 miles up from the river's mouth. This may have been a slight exaggeration. In 1836 a government engineer examined the St. Francis and reported that its channel was clogged by a huge raft of driftwood. Boats could travel above or below the raft, he said, but not through it. He thought that the whole St. Francis Basin had been severely shaken by the New Madrid earthquakes in 1811-1812, and that the raft had probably formed at that time, as a result of so many trees having fallen from the river's banks.

Some years later, the driftwood raft was broken up and removed. Boats could then navigate the St. Francis for a few months out of every year, but at low water periods the channel was often less than 16 inches deep in shoal areas.

Today the only commercial traffic on the St. Francis consists of logs that are towed from one point to another on the little river.

The St. Francis River Basin was always subject to frequent flooding from both headwater and backwater, but the Wappapello Dam and Lake, completed in 1941, now regulate the headwater flows. In the lower basin, 299.6 miles of an authorized 308 miles of levee have been completed. When the entire St. Francis River Basin Project is completed by the Corps of Engineers, hundreds of thousands of acres of fertile land will be protected from the backwater floods that have so often inundated the area in the past.

There is a National Forest in the lower St. Francis Basin, where fishing, hunting, and camping facilities are available for public use. The upper part of the river is essentially undeveloped and scenically attractive. The river has a rocky bed in its upper reaches, and the water is very clear and beautiful.

HORNER FIELD LIGHT

Mile 669.9 AHP, Map 18
Right bank, descending

The Horner Field Light is named for William B. R. Horner, who owned a plantation on the west bank of the river long before Arkansas became a State. Horner, who grew up in the territory, was a much respected attorney and territorial judge.

PRAIRIE POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 669.0 AHP, Map 18
Right bank, descending

When Bienville, the governor of the French colony of Louisiana, declared war against the Chickasaw Indians and began his second campaign against them in 1738, the open prairie at the mouth of the St. Francis River was designated as a rendezvous point and depot for the French army's supplies.

A crude fortification called Fort St. Francis was erected, but the position proved to be a weak one. It was soon abandoned in favor of Fort Assumption, on the fourth Chickasaw Bluff.

When the French left the Lower Mississippi Valley, Spain claimed the west bank of the river but American settlers were attracted to the area around the mouth of the St. Francis. One of the settlers under Spanish dominion was Sylvanus Phillips of North Carolina, who built a two-story log cabin that soon became a river landmark and a favorite stopping place for voyagers on the Lower Mississippi. Phillips later established the city of Helena, Arkansas, naming it for his daughter Helen.

The little settlement that grew up around the mouth of the St. Francis before 1800 was called Big Prairie. It was devastated by the earthquakes of 1811-1812 and most of the inhabitants fled.

On November 24, 1865, there was a disastrous steamboat collision off Prairie Point. A northbound steamer, the *Niagara*, and a boat called the *Post Boy* were involved, and it was said that the pilots of the two boats had apparently had a misunderstanding about their passing signals. The *Niagara* was badly damaged in the collision and sank rapidly. About 150 black soldiers from the U. S. Army were on board and were said to have drowned when the boat went down. The disaster, like the explosion of the *Sultana* earlier in the same year, received only brief notice in contemporary newspapers. The press, the nation, and government authorities were still preoccupied at the time with the surrender of the South, the assassination of Lincoln, and post-war politics.

ISLAND NO. 60

Mile 668.0 AHP, Map 18
Left bank, descending

Island No. 60, also known as Helena Island, had a snag-filled navigation channel that steamboat pilots avoided whenever possible. When water stages were high enough, they ignored the bendway and took the chute on the left or east side of the island.

The steamboat *St. Nicholas* was in the island chute on April 24, 1859, when a sudden explosion tore away the boat's stern and precipitated many of her passengers and crew and much of her cargo into the water. The boat caught fire immediately, and casks of whiskey and barrels of turpentine that had formed part of the freight load fed the flames. It was estimated that about 70 people lost their lives.

One of the victims of the *St. Nicholas* tragedy was the son of General Gideon J. Pillow, a veteran of the Mexican War, who was soon to become a Confederate leader. It was said that the anguished father roamed the river banks for weeks, searching for the body of his beloved son, but the boy was never found.

After the flood of 1858, the chute channel behind Island No. 60 began to fill with silt. Soon the island attached itself to the Mississippi shore, and boats were forced to take the channel to its right at all stages of the water.

HELENA, ARKANSAS

*Mile 663.5 AHP, Map 19
Right bank, descending*

Helena, Arkansas, was established by Sylvanus Phillips, for whom Phillips County, Arkansas, was named. The little town became a county seat in 1820.

In 1852, Helena was almost wiped out by a disastrous fire that destroyed many of its homes and businesses. It was still in the process of recovery when the Civil War began.

Helena was not fortified by Confederate authorities, and Union forces entered it unopposed early in the war. They erected gun batteries and garrisoned the town. On July 4, 1863, while most of the Union army was preoccupied with Vicksburg, a rebel force launched a vigorous attack on Helena. The Union garrison suffered heavy losses, and if the U. S. gunboat *Tyler* had not come to the rescue, the town would have fallen into Confederate hands. Heavy fire from the gunboat forced the rebels to flee, and the U. S. Army continued to occupy Helena for the remainder of the war.

Residents of occupied towns did not have an easy time during the Civil War. In Helena, a Union officer filed an official complaint in 1864, stating that he had become completely disgusted with the lack of discipline at Helena. The soldiers were robbing and plundering the citizens of the town in a disgraceful way, he said, and their behavior reflected little credit on the U. S. Army or the cause for which the Union was supposed to be fighting.

Shortly after the war ended, Helena found itself engaged in another and quite different struggle. The Mississippi was flinging sand and silt at the town's waterfront, and making it difficult for steamboats to get into the Helena harbor. Some early dike and revetment work was placed at Helena, but the river had its way, and docks and other facilities had to be moved to the south end of the town so that its river trade could be retained.

In recent years there has been some industrial development in the Helena area, and the town has also acquired a new educational institution called the National River Academy of America. The unique school has been established on a campus about 10 miles south of the town, and it offers a two-year course of study to young men or women who are interested in river-related careers. The Academy cadets are given practical experience on towboats, as well as classroom instruction. The flourishing new school promises to help relieve the desperate shortage of skilled personnel needed by towboat and barge lines.

The River and Harbor Act of 1960 authorized a Federal project for port development at Helena, and construction is now complete. The harbor channel area, including about four miles of waterfront, serves as an industrial port site. The harbor terminals handle petroleum, grain, and agricultural and industrial chemicals.

There is also a pleasure boat marina at Helena, where boaters will find available fuel, supplies, showers, and other comforts.

YAZOO PASS

*Mile 658.0 AHP, Map 19
Left bank, descending*

For many years a narrow channel called the Yazoo Pass connected Moon Lake to the Mississippi River. Local interests constructed a levee across it to prevent the country below it from being flooded, but the flood of 1858 washed away the inadequate embankment.

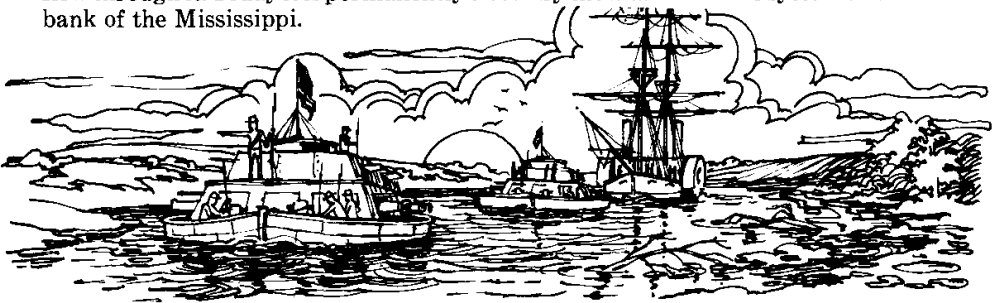
In 1859, local interests provided funds for a permanent closure of the Pass, and more than a million dollars were spent on this and other improvements that were designed to give protection to the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta on the east side of the Mississippi River.

In 1863, General U. S. Grant, probing every possible route that might allow him to get his army into a position to capture the city of Vicksburg, noted that steamboats had formerly passed from the Mississippi via the Yazoo Pass into Moon Lake. From Moon Lake, it was possible, he thought, for boats to pass into the Coldwater, Tallahatchie, Yallahusha, and Yazoo Rivers.

In January, 1863, Grant ordered the big levee at the Yazoo Pass cut so that his gunboats could explore the route. The Mississippi was above flood stages when the levee was blown up, and the flood waters rapidly enlarged the cut, filled the bayous, and flooded most of the low delta land between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers.

Transports carrying a Union brigade, convoyed by two Union gunboats, pushed their way through the narrow channel with difficulty, and after many vicissitudes succeeded in reaching Fort Pemberton, a Confederate fort at Greenwood, Mississippi. Because of the flood waters, no land approach could be made. The Union gunboats bombarded the rebel stronghold but failed to silence the Confederate guns. The Union withdrawal was slow, painful, and damaging, but the Federal force eventually made it back to the Mississippi. Later another expedition attempted to follow the same route, but the effort again failed. Levee crevasses made by the Union forces were still flowing, and no land approach could be made across the flooded fields.

The Yazoo Pass remained open for many years after the war had ended, causing widespread damage whenever the water stages were high enough to cause the river to flow through it. Today it is permanently closed by the mainline levee system on the east bank of the Mississippi.



GENERAL PILLOW LIGHT

Mile 657.7 AHP, Map 19
Right bank, descending

Gideon J. Pillow was born in Tennessee in 1806. As a young man, he practiced law in the town of Columbia, Tennessee, and had for his partner another Tennessean named James K. Polk. When the United States became involved in a war with Mexico, Pillow's former law partner was the President of the United States. The President appointed his old friend a brigadier general of volunteers, and later promoted him to major general.

When the Civil War began, General Pillow was not a secessionist but he was a southerner and a plantation owner. He cast his lot with the Confederacy, and was appointed a brigadier general in the Confederate Army. As a military leader, the old general demonstrated courage and loyalty beyond reproach, but his military judgment was often questioned. In 1862, he was suspended from command for some months, and during the remainder of the war he was without a command of any real importance.

General Pillow owned a plantation on the river below Helena, Arkansas, where two navigation lights still bear his name today. He died at Helena about ten years after the Civil War had ended.

MONTEZUMA CUTOFF

Mile 657.0 AHP, Map 19

The cutoff that became known as Montezuma Cutoff was a natural one, and is believed to have occurred some time between 1796 and 1817.

The cutoff removed 11 or 12 miles of the navigation channel in the reach. It became known as Montezuma Cutoff after a steamboat accident occurred in the cutoff some years later. The steamer *Montezuma* was a small, new boat when it tripped over a snag and went to the bottom on February 28, 1829. The wreck was visible in the area for many years afterward, and a sandbar grew up around it. Pilots called the sandbar the Montezuma bar, and the cutoff soon took the same name.

In later years, there were many other wrecks in the cutoff reach. The steamer *Luminary* ran headlong into a bar there in December, 1869. The 260-foot sidewheel steamer had served as a Union transport during the latter part of the Civil War.

DELTA, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 655.5 AHP, Map 20
Left bank, descending*

Delta, Mississippi, was the county seat of Coahoma County until 1850, when it became obvious that the location was an unfortunate one. Since the river seemed to be determined to gobble up the little town, the county government was removed, and one by one the streets and buildings crumbled into the river as the currents continued their attack on its waterfront.

By 1890, most of the town of Delta had disappeared. Today a marker erected by the Mississippi Historical Society points out the original location, but nothing remains of the village itself.

FRIARS POINT, MISSISSIPPI

*Mile 652.0 AHP, Map 20
Left bank, descending*

On the Lower Mississippi, it often happened that one town's loss was another town's gain. When Delta, Mississippi, began to fall into the river and lost its status as a seat of county government, Friars Point was the lucky recipient of the new courthouse and other benefits that went with being a county seat.

Friars Point flourished until the time of the Civil War. In 1863, the village attracted the attention of Union forces when some Confederate sympathizers took pot shots at Union gunboats and transports from its waterfront. A few days later, the citizens of Friars Point awoke to find that their town had been surrounded by about 100 Union soldiers, who were toting with them a menacing-looking 12-pounder howitzer. Several civilians were taken prisoner, and some fine Delta cotton was liberated before the Federal visitors departed.

Friars Point, impoverished by the war and without rail connections, went into a rapid decline as river traffic decreased. In 1930 county government officials took a hard look at their second choice and moved again, choosing an inland delta town that would not have to depend upon the whims of the Mississippi for its existence.

Today Friars Point huddles behind the massive mainline levee system, looking a little frayed around the edges as many of its buildings fall into decay. Its one main street contains several empty stores, but there are also some very nice homes and an excellent small museum in the village.

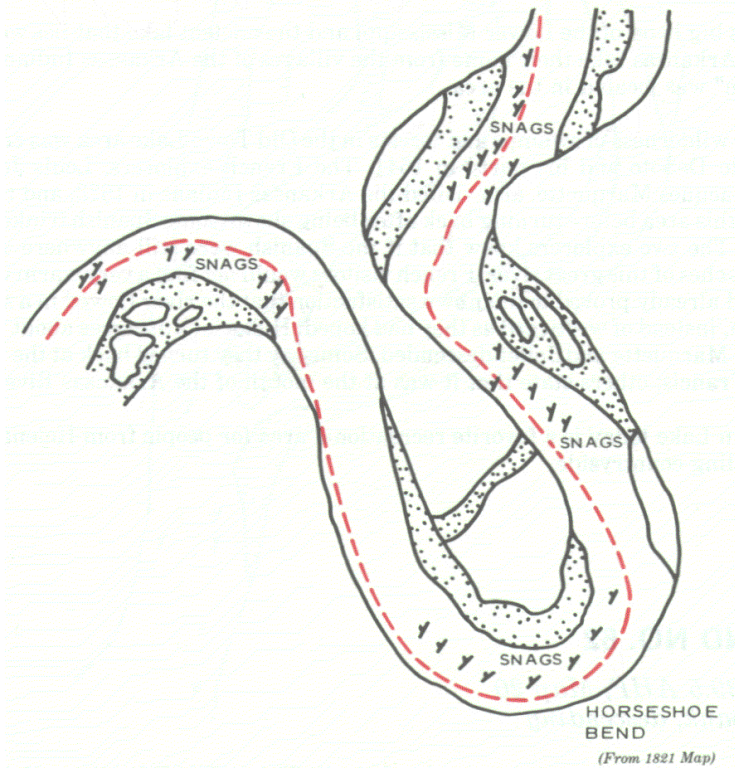
HORSESHOE CUTOFF

Mile 649.0 AHP, Map 20

When the Lower Mississippi cut across a narrow neck of land and abandoned its old channel at Horseshoe Bend in 1848, steamboat pilots were happy to find that they had about nine miles less to travel. The benefits were fleeting, as usual, for the river went to work immediately to lengthen other bends and soon compensated for the lost mileage.

Horseshoe Cutoff was one of three natural cutoffs that occurred in the Helena to Arkansas City reach of the river between 1765 and 1882. Theoretically these three cutoffs shortened the navigation channel by 30 miles, but by 1882 the channel was in fact 3.5 miles longer than it had been in 1765.

Horseshoe Cutoff left one permanent benefit for the area. The old riverbed became a beautiful oxbow lake that is known today as Horseshoe Lake. Like most of the oxbow lakes formed by the river's changes, it supports an abundant population of fish and waterfowl and provides an ideal recreational area for local residents.



HORSESHOE BEND. Horseshoe Bend in 1821 was filled with snags and already showing signs that the river intended to remove it from the main channel. Surprisingly enough, it took the Mississippi more than another quarter of a century to eat away the narrow neck of land and effect the cutoff.

ISLAND NO. 61

Mile 647.5 AHP, Map 20
Right bank, descending

When Horseshoe Bend was cut off by the river in 1848, Island No. 61 left the Mississippi shore and joined Arkansas. It is now almost indistinguishable from the mainland. Since it lies outside the mainline levee system, the island is subject to frequent flooding.

OLD TOWN BEND

Mile 645.0 AHP, Map 20

Both this big bend of the Lower Mississippi and the ancient lake that lies west of the river in Arkansas take their name from the villages of the Arkansas Indians, whose "old town" was located in the area.

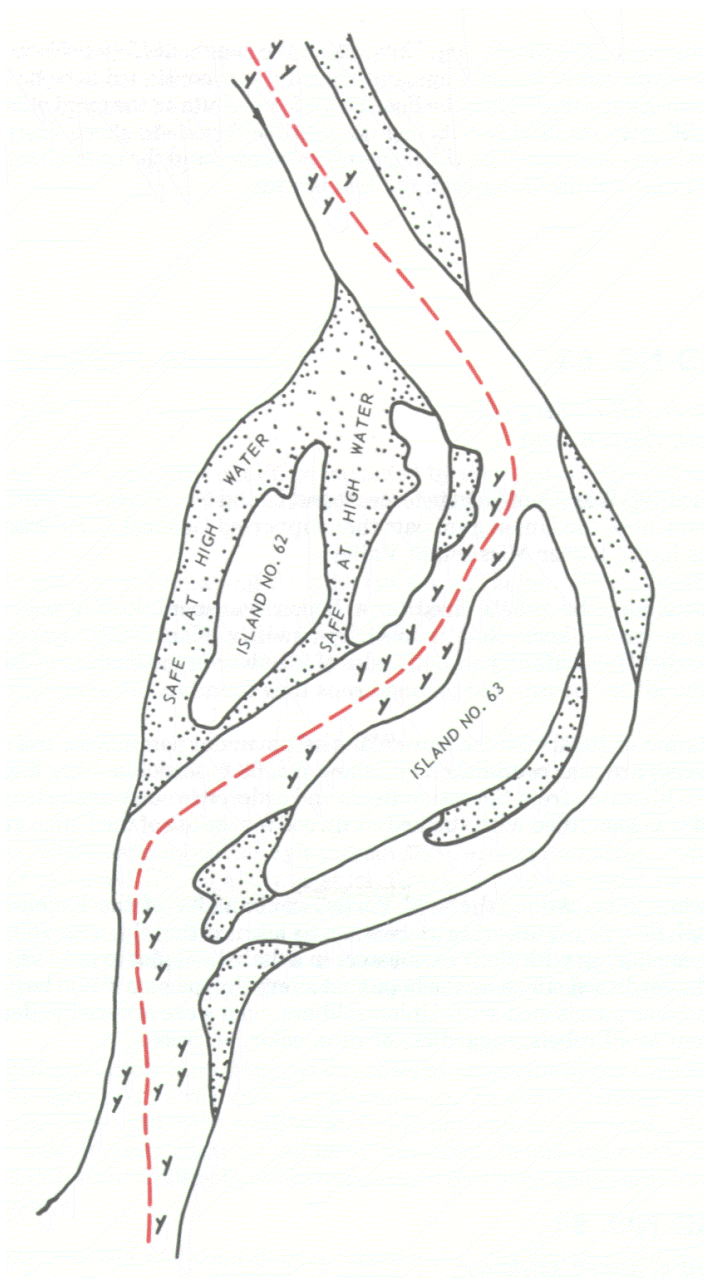
The vast wilderness of swamps and forests in the Old Town Lake area was crossed by Hernando DeSoto and his party in 1541. The French explorers, Louis Joliet and Father Jacques Marquette, also visited the Arkansas Indians in 1673, and may have reached this area before turning back after being shown some Spanish trinkets by the Indians. The two explorers knew that if the Spanish were still anywhere along the lower reaches of this great river, French visitors would not find a very warm welcome. They had already proved to their own satisfaction that the river flowed in a southerly direction, instead of westward as they had hoped. Historians disagree about the point to which Marquette and Joliet descended. Some say they turned back at the mouth of the St. Francis; others state that it was at the mouth of the Arkansas River.

Old Town Lake today is a favorite recreational area for people from Helena and the surrounding countryside.

ISLAND NO. 62

Mile 639.5 AHP, Map 20
Right bank, descending

In the flatboat and steamboat era, the navigation channel in the vicinity of Islands No. 62 and No. 63 was notoriously difficult. Even when the water was relatively high, the channel was filled with dangerous snags. At low water the river divided itself into several shallow channels, none of them deep enough for safe navigation.



ISLANDS NO. 62 AND NO. 63. A reconnaissance map made in 1821 shows the snags and bars that caused pilots to fear the channel that separated Islands No. 62 and No. 63 in 1821. Weaving safely through the snags required as much courage as skill, and when the water was low there was no channel deep enough for safe navigation.

In the winter of 1829-1830, Henry Shreve took the snagboat *Heliopolis* to the site and cleared away the worst of the snags, but the sandbars continued to be hazardous and new snags soon appeared. After the flood of 1858, the chute on the right of Island No. 62 began to fill with silt, and it attached itself to the Arkansas shore. In recent years, dikes have been constructed by the Corps of Engineers and the river channel has been contracted and stabilized between the two islands.

ISLAND NO. 63

Mile 638.5 AHP, Map 20
Left bank, descending

During the Civil War, Confederate forces found Island No. 63 a convenient location for the harassment of the Union gunboats that supported General U. S. Grant's military operations in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

On one occasion, the rebels fired on a Union transport, killing one soldier and wounding several others. Retaliation came swiftly. The *U.S.S. Tyler* and *U.S.S. Curlew* landed U. S. Infantry on both sides of the river in the vicinity of Island No. 63, and burned all the houses, barns, and crops they found in the area.

In the summer of 1864, with the Lower Mississippi under nominal control of the Union navy, a woodyard was established on Island No. 63 to serve the navy boats. Manned with slaves liberated from the cotton fields and ordered to cut wood instead, the island woodyard was soon filled with stacked cordwood for the use of the Union gunboats and transports.

A few weeks later, Admiral David Porter, commander of the Union fleet on the Mississippi, flew into a towering rage when he learned that the ungrateful freedmen had been conspiring with their ex-masters in a diabolical plot to put live torpedoes in some of the cordwood sticks, in the hope that a few Union boats would be blown to bits. The island was garrisoned with Union soldiers, who were ordered to deal out harsh punishment to all rebels, regardless of race, color, or creed.

ISLAND NO. 64

Mile 629.5 AHP, Map 21
Right bank, descending

Island No. 64 always lay close to the Arkansas shore. It began to join the mainland after the flood of 1858. Jackson Cutoff removed the island from the river entirely.

John James Audubon visited Island No. 64 in December, 1820, and recorded in his journal that he had amused himself by shooting at swans he found on the island. He failed to hit a single one, he added ruefully. About a year later, river engineers making a reconnaissance map of the Mississippi noticed the large number of swans in the vicinity of Island No. 64, and named it Swan Island on their map.

JACKSON CUTOFF

Mile 629.0 AHP, Map 21

Jackson Cutoff is an artificial cutoff, constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1941. The new channel removed a troublesome bend and shortened the navigation channel by 8.4 miles.

When the Engineers were making the pilot cut across Jackson Point, the Mississippi was rising rapidly. The high water caused the plug of earth at the upper end of the cut to blow out prematurely, and the new cutoff developed very rapidly. A towboat passed down the cutoff three days after the plug blew out, and the channel was lighted for navigation a few weeks later.

There had once been a small island in the middle of the river off Jackson Point. Zadok Cramer called it Island No. 65, and it was the scene of a couple of rather strange incidents during the steamboat era.

In December, 1845, a steamboat carrying about 100 German immigrants upriver ran on a sandbar at Island No. 65 and was stuck fast. The boat carried a heavy load of freight, as well as a number of cabin passengers. The captain, in an effort to lighten the boat enough to dislodge it from the bar, asked the immigrant deck passengers to disembark. He instructed them to walk across the neck of land, and said that he would pick them up on the upper end of the bend when he had dislodged the boat from the bar.

When the obedient immigrants trudged out of sight across the neck of land, the crew dislodged the boat and it resumed its journey up the river. When it passed the Germans, who were patiently waiting at the upper end of the bend, the captain ordered the boat to keep right on going. It was many hours later before another steamboat found the bewildered immigrants on the river bank and rescued them from their cold misery.

Another strange affair at Island No. 65 concerned a steamboat called the *Martha Washington*. This boat caught fire and sank near the island on January 14, 1852. Nine or ten people died, but the boat's officers and crew and most of the passengers survived. The cargo and the boat's papers were lost.

Shortly after the disaster, the surviving passengers of the *Martha Washington* issued a

public statement crediting the cool courage and prompt action of the boat's officers with saving their lives. The captain of the steamer replied modestly that all still might have been lost but for the ready assistance offered by three brave flatboatmen who approached the burning vessel and risked their own lives helping with the rescue effort.

Shortly after these polite amenities had been published in the newspapers, a scandal erupted. Divers had attempted to salvage the cargo of the *Martha Washington* and had found that the heavily insured cargo consisted of carefully crated bricks, stones, and other heavy debris. Both the shippers of the cargo and the captain of the boat were arrested, and there were several trials on charges of fraud, arson, and even murder, for there had been several deaths resulting from the fire. The evidence brought into court was inadequate for conviction and all of the accused persons were freed. Later it was rumored that one of the men involved had confessed on his deathbed that the story was true and that he had been one of the conspirators in the fraud.

By a strange coincidence, on the same day that the *Martha Washington* burned, another steamboat called the *George Washington* exploded near Grand Gulf, Mississippi, and 20 to 30 persons lost their lives. Apparently there was no connection between the two tragedies.

Island No. 65 had entirely disappeared from the bend at Jackson Point by 1884, and it no longer appears on current navigation maps.

SUNFLOWER CUTOFF

Mile 625.0 AHP, Map 21

Sunflower Cutoff was an artificial cutoff, constructed in 1942 by the Corps of Engineers. The last plug of earth was blown out of the cutoff channel on February 16, 1942, but the channel was slow to develop. It was eight months before the lights could be removed from the old bendway and boats could begin using the new cutoff at all stages of water.

The cutoff removed a steamboat landing from the river that had been well known to river men since 1838. Sunflower Landing had the further distinction of having been acknowledged to be the "most likely" location of the historic discovery of the Mississippi River in 1541 by Hernando DeSoto.

The discovery of the great river was an important event in the history of the North American Continent, but to the ragged band of exhausted Spanish explorers under DeSoto's command, it must have seemed to be more a disaster than an achievement. The Spaniards were looking for gold and silver and had already crossed more rivers than they could count. When they encountered the largest river they had yet seen, they were too tired and harassed to be imaginative and dubbed it "El Rio Grande," or the

Big River. Having discovered it, they were interested only in getting across it as quickly as possible, for they had hostile Indians hot on their heels.

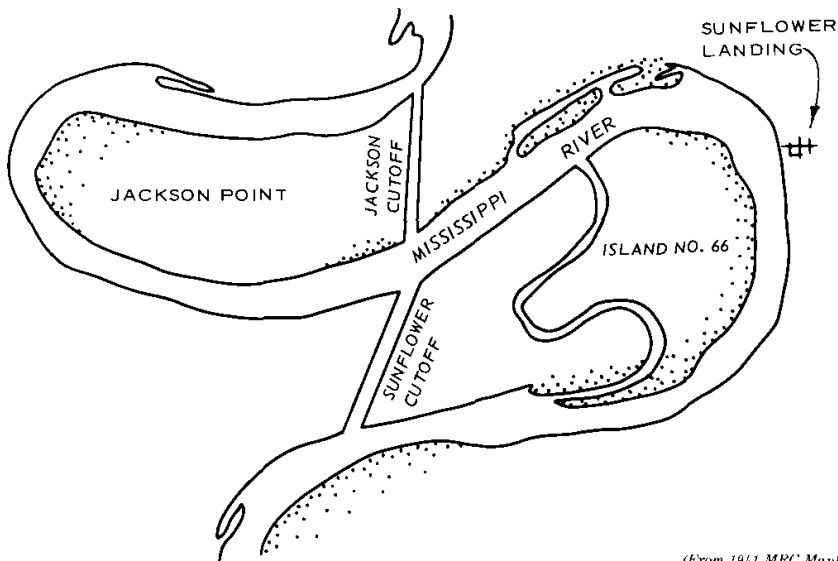
A member of the expedition dutifully recorded this description of the Mississippi:

"The river was almost half a league broad. If a man stood still on the other side, it could not be discerned whether he was a man or no. The river was of great depth, and of a strong current; the water was always muddy; there came down the river continually many trees and timber, which the force of the water and stream brought down."

For many years, historians debated the true location of DeSoto's discovery of the Mississippi. In 1935, the United States Congress asked the President to appoint a commission to study the DeSoto expedition and determine its true route through the Lower Mississippi Valley. The 400th anniversary of the event was approaching, and Congress wanted to know just where the anniversary observances ought to be held.

The United States DeSoto Expedition Commission met for the first time on March 5, 1936, and worked for the next two years on the difficult assignment. The final report was submitted to Congress on December 28, 1938. It was a careful, scholarly piece of work that proved to the satisfaction of most historians that DeSoto had discovered and crossed the Mississippi at a place that later became known as Sunflower Bend.

When the cutoff in 1942 made an oxbow lake of the old bend, the new lake was called DeSoto Lake, to honor the discoverer of the Mississippi.



(From 1941 MRC Map)

CUTOFFS IN 1941-1942. When the Navigation maps for 1941 were published, two cutoffs were under construction. Jackson Cutoff, completed later the same year, removed one large bend from the navigation channel, and Sunflower Cutoff, completed in 1942, removed old Sunflower Bend from the river.

ISLAND NO. 66

Mile 625.0 AHP, Map 21
Left bank, descending

When Sunflower Bend was a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi, steamboat pilots often had difficulty avoiding the numerous sandbars that made low water navigation hazardous. At the head of Island No. 66, an enormous heap of driftwood often accumulated.

On February 10, 1870, the steamer *Maggie Hays* stopped at the foot of Island No. 66 to make some minor repairs. When she resumed her journey and started past the island, a defective boiler exploded, sending scalding steam pouring over her decks. Most of the passengers had already retired for the night, and escaped injury, but the captain, engineer, and four deckhands were killed in the explosion. The disabled boat was run to shore by the pilot, where it burned to the water's edge and then sank. The cargo of pig iron and sugar was lost.

For many years afterward, the wreck of the *Maggie Hays* was an additional hazard for navigators in the bend.

ISLAND NO. 68

Mile 621.0 AHP, Map 21
Right bank, descending

Island No. 68 was the scene of several incidents during the Civil War. On May 29, 1863, the commander of the gunboat *Tyler* complained that the rebels were using the island as a base for harassment of Union boats. The rebels had two pieces of artillery, and would take pot shots at the boats as they passed Offutt's Landing. They would then rush back down across the narrow neck of Sunflower Bend to the vicinity of Island No. 68, where they would take a few more shots at the same boat after it had rounded the 20-mile bend.

A few weeks later, the same Confederate force prepared a clever ambush for a particular Union gunboat, but an informer spilled the beans and the intended victim became the attacker. When the gunboat shelled the Arkansas shore where the ambushers lay in wait, the surprised rebels fled, taking their artillery with them.

For a time all was quiet around Island No. 68, but in 1864, the commander of the *U.S.S. Tyler* found himself engaged in an embarrassing skirmish with a southern lady on a plantation opposite Island No. 68. The Union officer had been tipped off by an informer and had hoped to capture two rebel officers who were reported to be visiting the owner of the plantation. Taking a party of armed men, he crept ashore and surrounded the plantation house at two o'clock in the morning. With guns in hand, he

and his men aroused the household with shouts and volleys of gunfire. The two Confederate officers, who had taken the precaution of sleeping in the barn, were also aroused. Chuckling quietly, they slipped away to join their commands.

Mrs. Warfield, the mother of the two rebels, was in the house. When she came out, the noisy uproar ceased and the Navy commander demanded the surrender of the rebel officers. There were no Confederate officers in the house, Mrs. Warfield replied. Glancing toward the river, she said haughtily that she was glad to see that a Union gunboat was available, for she needed protection for a shipment of cotton that was waiting at her own landing nearby to be sent to New Orleans. The *U.S.S. Tyler* could convoy the steamer that was to take it down the river.

The Navy officer could hardly believe his ears. Turning red with rage, he answered roughly that his gunboat was not on the river for the purpose of helping rebels get their cotton to market. Mrs. Warfield calmly handed him a U. S. Treasury agent's permit, endorsed by a Union general, giving her permission to ship her cotton under Navy protection. She also handed him a personal permit for her to land at her plantation to attend to the cotton shipment. It was signed, endorsed, and approved by a U. S. Navy district commander.

With all these official documents in order, the commander of the *Tyler* had no choice. He provided the escort she demanded and saw her cotton safely on its way down the river. In reporting the matter to his superior officer, he said bitterly that it was difficult for him to understand why he should have to be out at 2:00 a.m. trying to capture Confederate officers, and then at 10:00 a.m. the same day be required to protect the cotton that obviously belonged to those same rebels, "thus affording them the means of supplying themselves with every comfort that money can procure ere they return to their brother rebels-in-arms."

His complaint went unanswered. High-ranking Union officers often took a puzzling interest in southern cotton, and their subordinates often found themselves engaged in giving assistance to "the enemy."

KNOWLTON CREVASSE

Mile 615.2 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

During a major flood in 1912, the river bank in front of Knowlton's plantation began to crumble away, and on April 16 the mainline levee collapsed. As the flood waters of the Mississippi poured through the narrow gap, the swift currents gouged out a deep hole behind the broken levee. Knowlton Blue Hole, as it is called, is still there today. There is a piece of the old levee in front of it, and a mainline levee setback behind it.

On April 20, 1927, there was a rerun of the old disaster, when the Mississippi River

levee system again broke in three places near Knowlton. About 2,000 residents of the area were trapped on high spots or housetops. A government launch participating in the rescue operations sank near the Knowlton Landing, and it was reported that 18 people drowned.

Since the construction of the levee system of the Mississippi River and Tributaries Project by the Corps of Engineers, there have been no further crevasses in the Knowlton area.

ISLAND NO. 69

Mile 613.0 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

In February, 1867, a sidewheel steamboat called the *Die Vernon* hit a snag and sank opposite Island No. 69. The old steamer had been built before the Civil War, and was one of the popular Vicksburg-Memphis packet boats.

The chute behind Island No. 69 was once navigable at high water stages, but it is now completely closed and the island has become a part of the Arkansas mainland.

LACONIA CREVASSE

Mile 609.5 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

When a Confederate detachment of cavalry attacked the Union merchant vessel, *Allen Collier*, on November 7, 1863, near Laconia Landing, the rebels unexpectedly hit the jackpot. In addition to a large sum of money found in the safe, the Confederates captured several Union soldiers and a U. S. Navy officer. The *Allen Collier* was burned, and the rebels helped themselves to the money and sent the Union men off to a southern prison camp for the duration of the war.

One of the major crevasses in the flood of 1927 occurred at Laconia. About 2,000 people were driven from their homes, as the water poured through Laconia Crevasse and inundated about 12,000 acres of fine farmland.

CONCORDIA BEND

Mile 608.0 AHP, Map 22
Right bank, descending

Concordia Bend was a part of the main channel of the Lower Mississippi until the river made a natural cutoff and left it lying on the Mississippi mainland. Islands No. 70 and No. 71 were in the bend, and were attaching themselves to the right shore when the change occurred. The two islands are now a part of the east bank and are surrounded by the oxbow lake that once formed a part of the river's main channel.

SCRUBGRASS BEND

Mile 601.0 AHP, Map 22

Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, included a note about the plant that gave this bend of the Lower Mississippi its name. Scrubgrass was a rush-like plant that stayed green all winter, Cramer explained. It had no leaves, and grew four to seven feet high along the edges of the river. The rough-surfaced and flexible stalks were gathered by early settlers and used to scrub wooden furniture and pewter plates and pitchers—hence the name.

Smith Point, which lay on the Mississippi side of the bend, was the site of several woodyards during the steamboat era. Most steamboats on the Lower Mississippi did not convert to coal until during or after the Civil War. Small steamers used 12 to 24 cords of wood every 24 hours, and larger ones could consume 50 to 70 cords in the same length of time.

WHITE RIVER

Mile 599.0 AHP, Map 23
Right bank, descending

The White River, a tributary of the Lower Mississippi, rises in northwest Arkansas, meanders through a small portion of southern Missouri, and then takes off in a southeasterly direction to join the Mississippi. It is about 686 miles long, and drains an area of more than 27,000 square miles. The basin terrain ranges from mountainous to flat, and agriculture and tourism provide a livelihood for most of its inhabitants.

The White River was an important artery of trade and transportation for early settlers in Arkansas. Canoes, dugouts, and small flatbottomed boats could navigate it for several hundred miles during most of the year. By 1831, a few small steamboats had ventured into the White River.

In 1831 the General Assembly of the Arkansas Territory petitioned the U. S. Congress for navigation improvements on the White River. Settlers complained that it was "obstructed with snags and lodgements of timber." Congress had a few larger rivers with even greater problems to be solved, and the White River continued unimproved.

During the Civil War, there was an abortive and inconclusive sortie into the White River by the Union gunboats late in 1862. In January, 1863, the Navy returned to the White River, and escorted Federal forces through the channel connecting the White and Arkansas Rivers and up to Fort Hindman. When the rebel fortification was captured, a post was established at the mouth of the White to prevent its use by Confederates.

After the Civil War ended, the residents of the White River Basin again asked the U. S. Government for navigation improvements. In 1871, the Corps of Engineers initiated a maintenance dredging and snagging project on White River that continued until the decline of river traffic caused it to be abandoned.

In 1961, residents of the area again became aware of the potential value of their waterway, and the Corps resumed the maintenance of a navigation channel in White River. Since 1961 soybeans, rice, sand and gravel, logs, limestone, and other products have been carried on the White River at a rate of more than half a million tons annually.

Ten miles of the White River, from its mouth to Wild Goose Bayou, now form an entrance into the McClellan-Kerr Navigation System of the Arkansas River.

The mainline levee and a backwater levee system protect a substantial portion of the White River Basin from major floods. Headwater dams and lakes provide power for the area and protection from headwater floods as well.

Local interests have constructed and now operate port facilities at several major towns on the White River. They included facilities at St. Charles, Clarendon, Des Arc, Augusta, Devalls Bluff, and Newport, all in Arkansas.

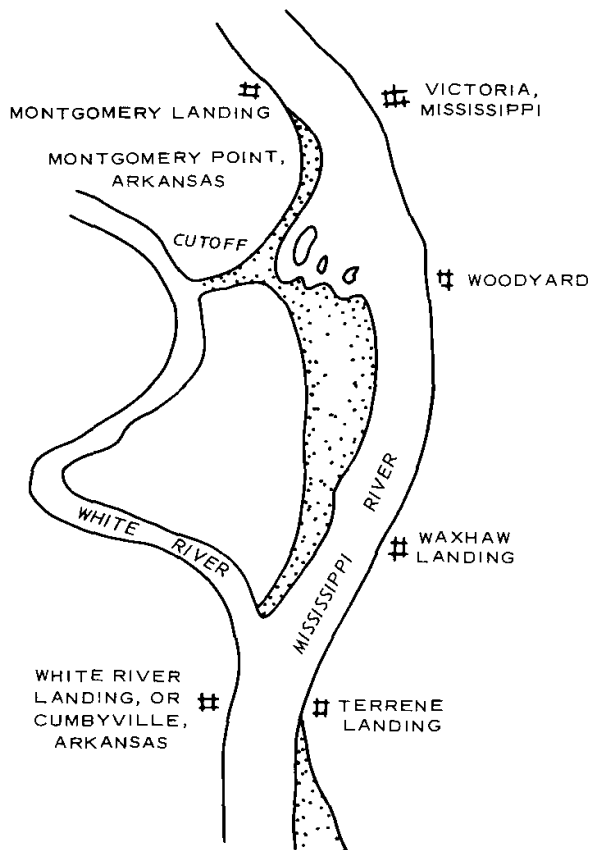
MONTGOMERY POINT, ARKANSAS

Mile 598.1 AHP, Map 23
Right bank, descending

John James Audubon, travelling by flatboat because he could not afford steamboat passage, arrived at Montgomery Point, Arkansas, on December 10, 1820. He was

exhausted, hungry, and decidedly cross. Without any real expectation of finding any conveniences or comforts available, he went to the only tavern in the area to obtain food and lodging. To Audubon's surprise, the innkeeper was a woman, and she knew how to make a weary traveler feel welcome. Mrs. Montgomery, he recalled later, was not only a handsome woman but she had manners that matched her good looks. Vastly impressed, Audubon confided to his journal that Mrs. Montgomery of Montgomery Point was a very fine lady who appeared to be "rather superior to those in her rank of life."

Montgomery Point served as a landing for the Arkansas as well as the White River. The old mouth of the White River was below the point, but at high stages boatmen took a chute behind Island No. 72 and went through a shortcut above the point. Island No. 72 no longer appears on current maps, and changes in the river's course have given the White River a new mouth above Montgomery Point.



MONTGOMERY POINT. Colonel Charles Suter's 1874 map of the Lower Mississippi shows the mouth of the White River below Montgomery Point. The shortcut at "Montgomery Cutoff" was used by pilots whenever possible. Today the White River joins the Lower Mississippi above Montgomery Point.

VICTORIA BEND

Mile 595.0 AHP, Map 23

The small community of Victoria, Mississippi, gave this bend of the Lower Mississippi its name, but changes in the river's course doomed the village to extinction.

One of the more spectacular steamboat tragedies of the pre-Civil War era occurred in Victoria Bend in 1857, when the steamer *Rainbow* caught fire. About 40 people lost their lives, and the accident led to a demand for legislation to force the steamboat lines to take precautions that would prevent such accidents in the future.

The flurry of concern aroused by the accident in Victoria Bend soon died down, and steamboat lines continued to pursue a policy dedicated to saving costs and time, rather than to the safety of their passengers. Between tragedies, the public seemed to view the explosions, fires, and snaggings on the river with the same kind of apathy with which people today view slaughter on the nation's highways. Passengers continued to patronize the fastest boats on the river, and the most admired pilots were the ones who would try to stay ahead of every other boat on the river, no matter what risks they must run.

ROSEDALE, MISSISSIPPI

Mile 585.0 AHP, Map 23

There were many early efforts to establish towns on the river opposite the mouths of the White and Arkansas Rivers, but none was entirely successful. Rosedale, originally called Floryville, was at the head of what is now known as Rosedale Bend. Riverton, a rival town that boasted that it had a mule railway to the interior, was located in the bend just below Rosedale. On the Arkansas side of the river, Cumbyville was a small community that fought a losing battle against caving banks almost from its beginning. While the Mississippi nibbled Cumbyville to death, it was also busy flinging sandbars down in front of Riverton and Rosedale. Riverton gave up the battle in the 1880's and quietly disappeared. Rosedale went into involuntary retirement as a river town because it was impossible to maintain its river landing.

While the three little towns were struggling to survive, Rosedale Bend was migrating southward. The tendency of bends on the Lower Mississippi to move downriver is a phenomenon that has often left a would-be port without a waterfront or navigable channel.

Today the names of Cumbyville and Riverton are preserved only by navigation lights. Rosedale, Mississippi, still exists but lies several miles from the river.

NAPOLEON CUTOFF

Mile 584.5 AHP, Map 24

Napoleon, Arkansas, was a flourishing town before the Civil War. It had long served as a landing for the Arkansas River trade, and was a busy, bustling place where flatboatmen, steamboatmen, professional gamblers, and ordinary citizens mingled noisily and happily for many years. By 1856, it had a population of more than 1,000 people.

Early in 1863, the Union Navy was having a great deal of trouble in the vicinity of Napoleon. The citizens of the town were always glad to harbor Confederates who desired to set up an ambush for Union boats. The rebels would fire at the enemy vessels from one side of the narrow neck of Beulah Bend, and then hustle their guns across the neck and fire at the same boat again when it had rounded the bend.

In the spring of 1863, Lt. Com. T. O. Selfridge of the U. S. Navy made a welcome proposal to Admiral David D. Porter, commander of the Union fleet. If a cutoff could be constructed across the neck of Beulah Bend, Selfridge said, the rebels would no longer be able to use the area for the harassment of the Union boats. Given permission to try the plan, Selfridge put his men to work and succeeded in opening up the new channel in April, 1863.

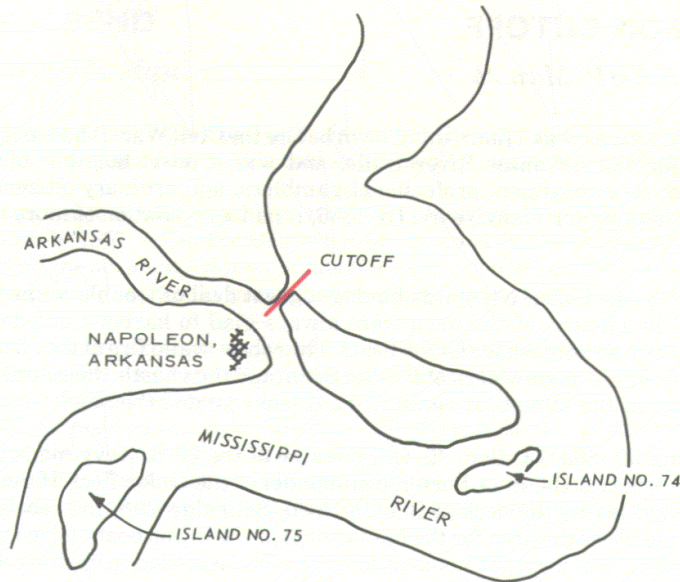
Admiral Porter was elated. In his official report, he said that the cutoff made by Selfridge was particularly interesting because "it shows how easily cutoffs can be made when conducted with ordinary intelligence." The cutoff that General U. S. Grant was simultaneously trying to effect at Vicksburg would come to nothing, Porter explained, because it was being made by Army men, who knew nothing of such matters.

The Union vessels had no further difficulties with the rebels at Napoleon after the cutoff. The navigation channel was shortened by about ten miles, and a small Union garrison was able to defend the mouths of both the Arkansas and the White Rivers.

What was good for the U. S. Navy was not necessarily best for the town of Napoleon, Arkansas, of course. The cutoff changed the course of the Lower Mississippi and subjected the town to an attack by currents that caused its waterfront to crumble into the river. One by one its streets and buildings disappeared into the muddy Mississippi. By 1882, the town was no longer shown on river maps.

In 1954, the Lower Mississippi fell to an extremely low stage, and for a short time the remains of the old town of Napoleon, Arkansas, could be seen scattered among the sandbars exposed by the river.

Selfridge's cutoff also affected the town of Prentiss, Mississippi, located on the east bank of the river opposite Napoleon. The river bank in front of Prentiss caved away rapidly, and about 8,000 feet of the Prentiss levee collapsed and was swept away by the river. When a new levee system was constructed by local interests after the Civil War had ended, the preservation of Prentiss was already a lost cause. The town was left outside the levee system, exposed to frequent flooding and erosion that soon destroyed



NAPOLEON CUTOFF. An artificial cutoff, made by Union Navy forces in 1863, removed Island No. 74 and a big bend from the main channel of the Lower Mississippi. The cutoff caused changes in the river that eventually resulted in the total destruction of the town of Napoleon, Arkansas. Captain Thomas O. Selfridge, who made the cutoff, reported to Admiral David D. Porter that he had removed a very bad "guerilla station" by cutting off the point above Napoleon.

it completely. Prentiss is said to have been briefly visible at extreme low water stages some years ago.

Island No. 74 was removed from the main channel of the river by the cutoff, and the old bed of the river became known as Lake Beulah. During the flood of 1912, a levee at the lower end of Lake Beulah developed more than 100 sandboils and became the scene of a dramatic but unsuccessful flood fight. On April 17, the sudden collapse of the weakened structure took the lives of several of the workers who were trying to prevent the crevasse. Flood waters poured through the break, covering almost one million acres of rich Mississippi-Yazoo Delta farmlands. About 20,000 residents of the area were forced to flee their homes.

Levee workers were in the process of closing the crevasse and strengthening the Beulah levee when a January rise of the river in 1913 breached it again, driving more than 10,000 people out of their homes. The Illinois Central Railroad undertook, under contract, the almost impossible task of trying to close the crevasse before the second rise of the record flood of 1913 arrived. The railroad laid a temporary track and dumped rock in carload lots. The heroic effort of the workers was successful this time. When the river rose again, the Beulah levee was repaired and withstood the strain of the great flood.

ARKANSAS RIVER

Mile 584.0 AHP, Map 24
Right bank, descending

The Arkansas River rises in the Rocky Mountains, flowing in a generally southeasterly direction for almost 1,500 miles before it joins the Lower Mississippi 584 miles above the Head of Passes. With its tributaries, the Arkansas drains a vast area of about 160,645 square miles.

Spanish explorers under the command of Hernando DeSoto crossed the Mississippi in the vicinity of Sunflower Landing, Mississippi, in 1541 and made their way to the Arkansas River. Following the tributary up to its junction with the Canadian River, the expedition set up a winter camp on the Arkansas and remained there until the spring of 1542.

It was more than a century before the Indians who lived in the Arkansas River Basin saw another white man. In March, 1682, the French explorer LaSalle led his small expedition into the Arkansas and visited an Indian village where he planted a wooden cross and informed the natives that their lands were now under the dominion of France.

Four years later, when LaSalle had failed to return to the Mississippi, Henri de Tonti established a small outpost on the Arkansas and raised the flag of France over it. Tonti left six men at the Arkansas Post as a symbol of French sovereignty and went off to search for LaSalle.

When Iberville and Bienville succeeded in establishing a feeble French colony on the lower reaches of the Mississippi, French colonial officials decided that the great river's tributaries ought to be more fully explored. Bernard de la Harpe was sent to investigate the Arkansas in April, 1721, and was ordered to establish a small military post near its mouth. Later the same year, John Law, French speculator and promoter, received a large grant of land at the mouth of the Arkansas. He sent a large number of workmen and colonists to the New World with orders to begin the construction of what he hoped would be his personal empire.

French explorers had reported that the Arkansas was a navigable stream, but a French priest who was in the area in 1721 said that its navigability had been greatly exaggerated. Traders and travelers had to drag their pirogues through many of the river's rapids and shallows, he explained.

Pirogues were wooden dugouts used by Indians and early explorers and settlers in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The birchbark canoe of Canada and the northern lakes was too frail for the tumultuous currents and heavy drift found in the Lower Mississippi, but the boat the French called the pirogue was tough and durable enough to stand the hard wear. Pirogues were usually made of hollowed-out cypress logs, but occasionally travelers mentioned seeing walnut pirogues.

Pirogues are still in use today, especially in the bayou country of southern Louisiana. A few are still made from a single log, but most are constructed from marine plywood. It

is a shallow-draft craft and can be extremely unstable in the water in inexperienced hands. Louisiana fishermen are apt to tell a novice that he should not attempt to paddle a pirogue unless he parts his hair in the middle and has an equal number of teeth on either side of his mouth.

When the French withdrew from the Lower Mississippi Valley, the Arkansas Post fell into Spanish hands. The Spanish called it Fort Carlos III of the Arkansas, and later changed the name to Fort San Estevan of the Arkansas. A village grew up around the crude fortification, with a mostly French population of 40 to 50 whites. According to contemporary accounts, the people were all “poor and miserable.”

In 1803, the Spanish left the post and a French flag flew over it again for just 20 days, after which it was occupied by American troops. The town that had grown up around the military post became the seat of government of the new Arkansas Territory.

Arkansas was admitted to the Union as a State in 1836, and left it in 1861 to join the Confederacy. The old military post was rebuilt and became a Confederate fortification called Fort Hindman. Federal forces, smarting from one of their early defeats at Vicksburg, Mississippi, launched a cooperative Army-Navy attack on the rebel fort and captured it on January 11, 1863. It was occupied by a Union garrison until the end of the Civil War.

The Arkansas River, hazardous though it was, had served as an important trade artery and pathway for western exploration under American rule. The first steamboat to enter the river was the *Comet*, a small steamer that went up to the military post in 1820. By 1833 half a dozen small steamboats were regularly engaged in the Arkansas trade, and by 1848 the number had increased to about 30. Snagging operations and general maintenance dredging in the Arkansas was begun by the Federal Government in the mid-1830's. More than 100 years later, efforts to improve the Arkansas River ceased because of the decline in commercial traffic on the river.

Revival of waterborne transportation led to the construction of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System by the Army Corps of Engineers, and more than four million tons of cargo moved on the new waterway during its first year of operation. Seventeen locks and dams and a number of lakes are included in the project. The waterway begins at the mouth of White River, and extends through a bayou into the Arkansas about ten miles from the mouth of the White.

The Arkansas Post National Memorial is a Federally owned site where a small museum is maintained to explain the history of the area. The Arkansas Post property is also a wildlife sanctuary. There are no launching areas, camping, or eating facilities maintained in connection with the site but it can be enjoyed by visitors who are interested in the history and ecology of the area.

ISLAND NO. 75

Mile 579.0 AHP, Map 24
Right bank, descending

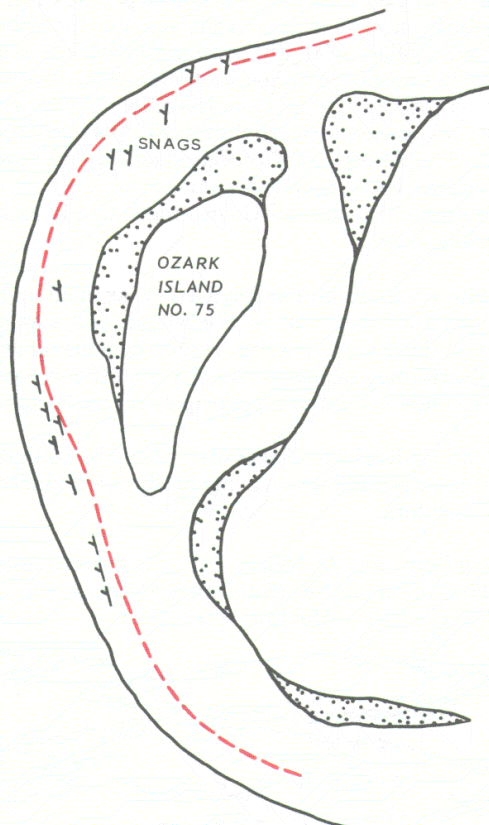
Island No. 75 was often called Ozark Island, and it originally lay in the middle of the Lower Mississippi. The navigation channel that ran past the island was filled with snags.

In the 1840's the steamboat *Belle Zane* had a bizarre accident at Island No. 75. The boat hit a snag, and for reasons that were never understood, promptly turned upside down. Of the 90 people on board, contemporary accounts estimated that about 50 made it to the safety of the island. It was a cold, bitter winter night, and when rescuers found the survivors the next morning it was said that only 16 people remained alive.

In 1848 the steamboat *Clarksville* caught fire at Ozark Island, and again there was a heavy loss of life. About 21 people were said to have perished in the flames, or were drowned in their effort to reach the island.

In 1857 the pilots of the steamboats *Humboldt* and *Belfast* had a slight misunderstanding about their passing signals and attempted to occupy the same side of the channel. The *Belfast* was not seriously damaged, but the *Humboldt* was mortally wounded and sank so fast that 15 of her passengers drowned.

Island No. 75 belonged to the State of Mississippi, but the river retired it to the Arkansas shore. River pilots who knew of its connection with so many old tragedies were glad to see the last of it.



OZARK ISLAND. An 1821 map showed the navigation channel at Island No. 75 filled with snags, and the passage would claim a good many victims before the steamboats disappeared from the river trade on the Lower Mississippi.

CAULK NECK CUTOFF

Mile 576.1 AHP, Map 24

Caving banks in Bolivar Bend had been eating up real estate at a rapid rate for quite a number of years before the Army Corps of Engineers decided that removing the bend would be easier and less costly than trying to protect it. They began the construction of Caulk Neck Cutoff in April, 1937. The cutoff was slow to develop and not until January, 1938, could commercial traffic be permanently routed through the river's new channel. In the fall of the same year the head of the old bendway began to close with silt deposited by the river.

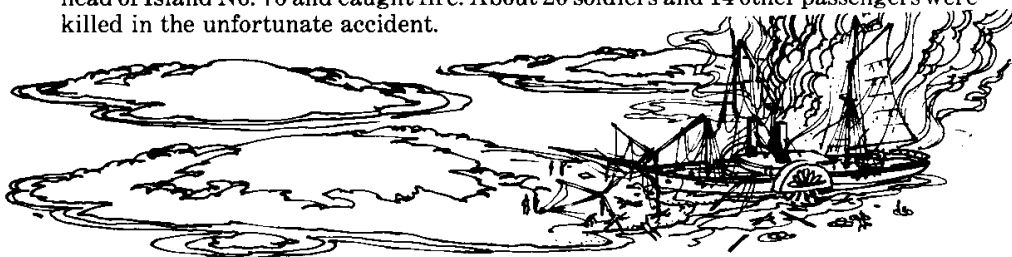
The old Bolivar Bend soon became a large and handsome oxbow lake. It was called Lake Whittington to distinguish it from an earlier bed of the river that had become a lake after a natural cutoff and had taken the name of Lake Bolivar.

Cut off from the main channel of the river along with Bolivar Bend were Monterey Bend, Island No. 76, and the small community of Bolivar, Mississippi. The village of Bolivar had a special problem after the Civil War. In 1863, the *U.S.S. Conestoga* had sent a party of seamen ashore to cut the levee that protected the little town and the country back of it. The commander of the Union gunboat had hoped that if he could not whip the rebels, he could at least drown them out. More than ten years later, the gap was still open. Local people had no funds to repair it, and whenever the river rose the water poured through the levee break and flooded the village and the farmland behind it. The Army Chief of Engineers asked Congress to allow the Corps to repair the Bolivar levee. Since it had been cut solely for military purposes, he said, he thought it was only fair that the Government should bear the expense of restoring it. His request was denied.

There was an interesting Civil War incident at Island No. 76. A gunboat commander seized a rebel boat at the island, and was embarrassed to find that the steamer's captain carried a permit signed by none other than Admiral David D. Porter himself. Mumbling apologies, the Union officer handed the boat back to its captain and watched it land and pick up some confiscated Delta cotton.

Later Island No. 76 was one of the islands that the Union navy used as a woodyard and a campground for an army of liberated blacks who cut and stacked the wood for their liberators.

On February 25, 1865, a Union transport called the *James Watson* ran aground at the head of Island No. 76 and caught fire. About 20 soldiers and 14 other passengers were killed in the unfortunate accident.



CYPRESS BEND

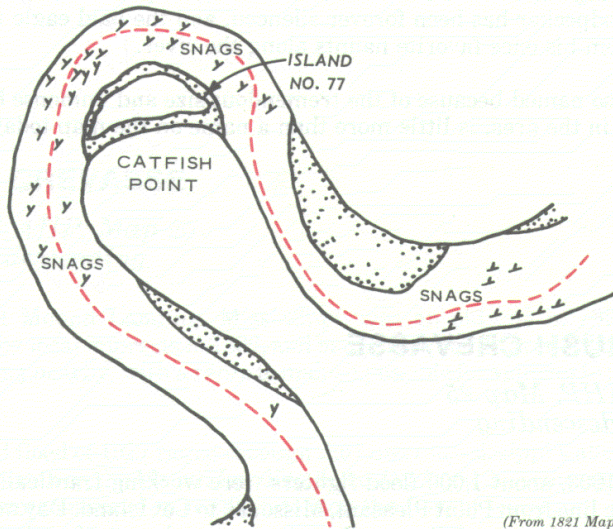
Mile 570.0 AHP, Map 24

One of the most useful species of trees that early French colonists found in abundance in the Lower Mississippi Valley was the bald cypress. The settlers used the bark as roofing for their crude houses, and sawed the huge trees into planks, which they exported from the colony.

Le Page Du Pratz, one of Louisiana's earliest historians, mentioned the cypress trees in a history of the colony that he published in 1758. The colonists were wasting the cypress, he said, and it had already become so scarce in lower Louisiana that the lumber had tripled in price.

When French dominion in the Lower Mississippi Valley ended in 1763, the cypress forests in the more settled areas of French Louisiana had indeed been depleted, but in the upper part of the Mississippi Valley cypress was still abundant. The American settlers who moved in after 1800 found it as useful and profitable as it had been for the French.

Zadok Cramer, author of *The Navigator*, found loggers working diligently at Cypress Bend in 1801. He noted disapprovingly that they were denuding the public lands of some of the finest stands of cypress. He questioned the moral and legal right of individuals to appropriate for their own benefit the timber which grew on land to which they had no title whatsoever. John James Audubon also found loggers at work



CYPRESS BEND. John James Audubon found this snag-filled, difficult passage at Cypress Bend in 1820. Confederate forces disabled a Union ram in the bend in the Civil War. The rebel cavalry eluded the enemy when pursued, but left behind a 12-pounder howitzer stamped "U.S. 1828," which made the Union officers wonder how troops so poorly equipped could give them so much trouble.

when he came down the Lower Mississippi in 1820-1821. At Natchez, Mississippi, he saw some of the huge log rafts that were being floated down to New Orleans. He talked to a rafter who boasted brazenly that he had made \$6,000 on a previous trip to New Orleans. Audubon described the timber bluntly as “logs stolen from the Government’s land.”

After the Civil War, when labor was cheap and improved equipment was available, the rape of the southern forests proceeded at a rapid pace. Timber could be purchased from destitute landowners for a minimum price, and large sawmills were constructed in the vicinity of tracts of virgin timber.

By 1916 the finest tracts of timber were logged out, and the little towns that had sprung up around the big sawmills were pockets of poverty, misery, and unemployment. When World War I and World War II brought increased demand for any and all kinds of lumber, small operators moved into the cut-over forests to harvest what was left.

In recent years, lumber and paper companies have found it profitable to purchase their own land and grow their own trees. Fast-growing species such as cottonwood and pine are preferred, of course, and slow-growing varieties such as bald cypress grow ever more scarce.

The loss of the forest habitat led to irreversible ecological changes in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The modern voyager on the river has only a slim chance of coming upon “about 100 Pelicans on a San Barr” as Audubon did in 1820, or of seeing the sky darkened with flights of waterfowl, as other travelers reported. The wild cry of the ivory-billed woodpecker has been forever silenced, and the bald eagle has virtually disappeared from his once favorite haunts along the river.

Cypress Bend, so named because of the tremendous size and immense beauty of the cypress forests in the area, is little more than a name on the map today.

HOLLY BRUSH CREVASSE

Mile 566.7 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

On March 15, 1903, about 1,000 flood fighters were working frantically to save the west bank levee line from Point Pleasant, Missouri, to Cat Island. Day and night they labored, piling sandbags and dirt on all the known weak spots, but they could never quite stay ahead of Old Man River.

On March 16, the flood of 1903 overtopped the levee at Holly Brush plantation, and the embankment began to crumble. The gap soon widened to more than a mile, and water

poured over most of Lee, Crittenden, and St. Francis counties in Arkansas. The crevasse caused great hardship and suffering, and there was a heavy loss of livestock in the flooded area.

The Holly Brush Crevasse was one of seven major crevasses that occurred during the disastrous flood of 1903. The flood marked the beginning of a vigorous campaign for the development of a comprehensive flood-control program for the entire Lower Mississippi Valley, but it would take almost exactly a quarter of a century more to convince the rest of the nation that the flood problem was a national one.

CHICOT LANDING, ARKANSAS

Mile 565.0 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

Early French voyagers thought that the river's snags resembled ugly, blackened, broken teeth, and they applied the name "Chicot" or "teeth" to several of the islands, points, and landings on the Lower Mississippi. This old steamboat landing still bears the French name of Chicot Landing.

MOUND CREVASSE

Mile 560.5 AHP, Map 25
Left bank, descending

The levee at Mound Landing, Mississippi, was an old one in 1927. It had been constructed by local interests in 1867, and had subsequently been enlarged. There was a ferry landing nearby, with a ramp to make it possible for vehicles to pass over the top of the levee.

As the record flood of 1927 raged through the Lower Mississippi Valley, flood fighters kept a close watch on the Mound Landing levee. On April 20, some seepage was noted, and emergency measures were taken to stop the flow of water.

About 6:30 a.m. on April 21, 1927, an observer noticed a large stream of water pouring through the earthen embankment. A violent "blowout" followed, and the levee collapsed. Within a few hours the gap reached a width of 1,000 feet, and was still enlarging.

The crevasse water spread over a vast extent of farmland. Planters and farm laborers fled their homes in advance of the crevasse water. In the town of Greenville, Mississippi, flood fighters watched developments anxiously, wondering whether the municipal levee would hold. When it became obvious that it would not, the town was ordered evacuated. Before the town's 15,000 inhabitants could be taken to safety, water was six to nine feet deep in the streets of Greenville. Rapid currents ran along the streets, tossing rescue boats around as though they were wood chips. Refugees were plucked from levees, housetops, mounds, and other high spots. They were placed on barges, and the steamer *Sprague*, largest towboat on the river, was one of the boats that took them to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where they were housed in tents for the duration of the flood.

The flood waters that poured through Mound crevasse carried tons of sand that it dropped on the fields just inside the levee gap. A 65-acre lake in the vicinity is another permanent legacy of the flood.

The mainline levee system of the MR&T Project replaced the broken levee at Mound Landing after the flood of 1927.

CHOCTAW BEND

Mile 559.0 AHP, Map 25

The Choctaws were the most numerous nation of Indians that inhabited the area known today as the State of Mississippi. The Choctaws began ceding their land to the United States in 1805, and by 1830 all but a small portion of them had been persuaded to move west of the Mississippi. A few who steadfastly refused to depart were settled on an Indian Reservation in the interior of Mississippi.

There is a very large sandbar in the river at Choctaw Bend, and an often-repeated story blames the steamer *Indiana* for it. It was said that when the steamboat went down in this bend in 1875, the sandbar began to grow around the wreck almost immediately.

YELLOW BEND

Mile 554.2 AHP, Map 25

During a survey made by the Corps of Engineers in 1861, it was reported that this big bend in the river was called Yellow Bend because of the peculiar color of the soil on the right bank of the bend. It was said to be composed of very dense, yellow clay.

When the clay bank caved away, the Corps of Engineers had to place several miles of concrete revetment in the bend to protect the mainline levee on the west bank.

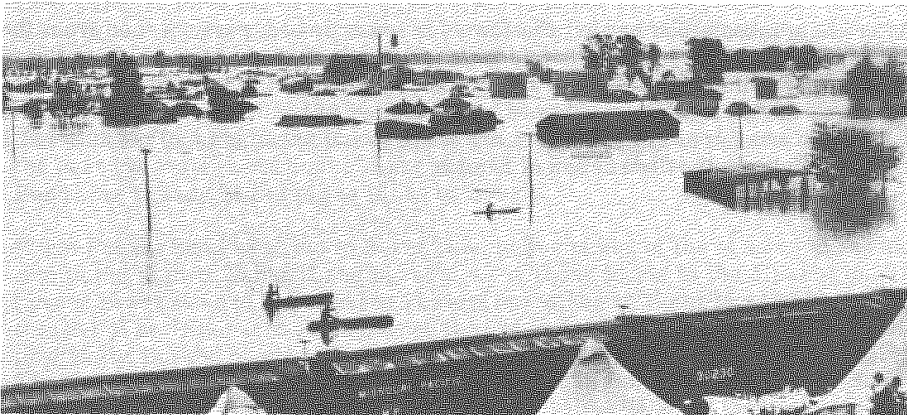
ARKANSAS CITY, ARKANSAS

*Mile 554.0 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending*

As river towns go, Arkansas City is a mere youngster. It was not established until the 1870's, when it was built to serve as a county seat for Desha County, Arkansas. The old seat of the county government, Napoleon, was being carried away by the river's changes after Napoleon Cutoff, and the county's only other river town, Eunice, had been destroyed by Federal troops during the Civil War.

The site chosen for the new town proved to be an unfortunate one. It was extremely vulnerable to flooding, and in 1903 a levee crevasse in the area damaged Arkansas City severely. In the great flood of 1927, the 2,000 residents of the town had to be rescued from the housetops when the streets were flooded to a depth of ten feet or more.

The mainline levee system constructed after the flood of 1927 protected Arkansas City from further flood damage, but the river had some new dirty tricks in store for it. Choctaw Island attached itself to the west bank of the river, and began to grow down in front of Arkansas City. The town lost its waterfront landing. Later it was bypassed by major highways.



ARKANSAS CITY IN 1927. The great flood of 1927 inundated most of the houses and buildings in the little town of Arkansas City, Arkansas. Refugees from the flooded village were housed in tents on the levee until the water subsided. The river gage at Arkansas City stood at 49.0 feet when the above photograph was taken on May 6, 1927.

Arkansas City survived all the disasters and now lies some distance from the river and more than two miles from a major highway. In spite of its shabby appearance, the town has a certain charm that stems from being just out of the hustle and bustle of modern highway traffic. Some of its early buildings still stand. There is a small library, a new postoffice building that harmonizes with older structures, and a small museum full of local treasures.

One interesting and unique feature of the little town is that all its streets are named for famous old steamboats. Robt. E. Lee Avenue intersects Natchez Street. Sprague Street ends at the levee and is intersected by Kate Adams Street.

EUNICE LANDING, ARKANSAS

Mile 553.5 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

Eunice, Arkansas, was a small pre-Civil War community that served as a terminal for a railroad. Goods from the interior were brought to Eunice by rail to be transferred to steamboats for shipment up or down the Mississippi.

On June 14, 1863, the Union gunboat *Marmora* was cruising past the Eunice landing when it was fired upon by Confederate artillery. The Union vessel tossed a few shells in the general direction of the little town, and then anchored at the landing. The following morning the *U.S.S. Nebraska* came down the river and it, too, was fired upon as it came in sight of Eunice.

After the gunboats bombarded the town for some time, a party of men from the *Marmora* went ashore. The Union force set fire to the houses, stores, and a railroad depot. The commander of the *Marmora* reported afterward that his men had totally destroyed the town. "Not a single vestige of the town of Eunice remains," he said. No rebel force was found in the vicinity, and the Union detachment had not suffered a single casualty in the destruction of Eunice.

ISLANDS NO. 80 AND NO. 81

Mile 551.5 AHP, Map 25
Right bank, descending

Islands No. 80 and No. 81 lay side by side on the right of the navigation channel, and when the water was high enough steamboats took the chute between them. The

steamer *St. Joseph* was northbound in this area on the last day of January, 1850, when her boilers exploded and the boat caught fire. Contemporary accounts estimated the death loss at 12.

Rumors that the boat had been racing with the steamer *South America* were hotly and publicly denied by the captain of the *St. Joseph*. It was indeed true, he said, that he had passed the other boat just before the accident, but this was only because his own boat was so much faster than the *South America* that he was forced to pass her or stop his engines.

ASHBROOK CUTOFF

Mile 549.4 AHP, Map 25

Rowdy Bend, Miller Bend, Spanish Moss Bend, and Bachelor Bend were just above Greenville, Mississippi, and river pilots called them “the Greenville Bends.”

For many years, the Corps of Engineers did everything possible to prevent natural cutoffs at the Bends. One of the early revetment works was placed on the upper side of Ashbrook Neck to prevent a cutoff from occurring, but the work was badly damaged in the flood of 1892. During the 1917-1918 work season, the Engineers built a dike across Ashbrook Neck and constructed new revetment works. Rowdy Bend, however, kept elongating, until by 1930 the distance around the bend was more than 13 miles.

When the Army Corps of Engineers initiated its artificial cutoff program in the 1930's, the troublesome Greenville Bends were included in the project. At Ashbrook Neck, where the river had threatened to make its own cutoff for so long, the Corps began the construction of an artificial cutoff in August, 1935. The narrow plug that had been left in the middle of the cut was blasted out on November 19, 1935. Two days later the Mississippi River Commission, on its annual inspection trip, came through the new cutoff channel in the steamer *Mississippi*. The cutoff developed so well that by the next low water season all of the river's flow was in the new channel and Rowdy Bend was already beginning to fill at both ends.

When Rowdy Bend was removed from the main channel of the Mississippi, a small community called Gaines Landing was left without access to the Mississippi. The former river town had been used as a base of operations by Confederate troops during the Civil War. Union forces had burned the town after their gunboats were fired on in its vicinity, but the rebels continued harassing the fleet from the ruins of the village. The steamer *Delta*, a Union transport, was attacked in front of Gaines Landing by the 6th Texas Cavalry. The little steamer was so badly damaged that her crew ran her to the shore and abandoned her.

In 1864, a detachment from a Confederate brigade moved a battery of ten guns to Gaines Landing and launched a vigorous attack on the *U.S.S. Curlew* as it patrolled

the area. The gunboat was disabled and would have fallen into Confederate hands and been destroyed had the *U.S.S. Tyler* not rushed to her support.

From Gaines Landing, the rebel artillery detachment roamed the river's bank above and below the town, attacking a total of 21 Union boats. The Confederate officer in command later reported with some pride that he had disabled 5, damaged 5 more, sunk 2, burned 2, and captured 2.

Union soldiers drove the rebels out, and for a time all was quiet at Gaines Landing. Navy gunboats patrolled the Greenville Bends constantly, and commercial steamers made regular trips between New Orleans and Cairo.

On August 10, 1864, the steamer *Empress* was northbound at Gaines Landing when the Confederate battery made a surprise attack that almost resulted in the loss of the boat. The *Empress* was an unarmed commercial steamer and was virtually helpless against attack. She received 63 direct hits, and her captain was killed. Panic-stricken passengers demanded that the boat should be surrendered forthwith, but her crew and officers refused. The Union gunboat *Romeo* heard the commotion and came to the rescue of the disabled packet in the nick of time. She was towed to a safe place for repairs.

For the remainder of the war, a garrison of cavalry forces, artillery, and a U. S. Colored Infantry regiment kept the rebels away from the ruins of Gaines Landing.

A large part of Miller Bend was also removed from the main channel of the river by the cutoffs in the Greenville Bends. In the early steamboat days, the bend had been filled with snags and was notoriously difficult. It was in this bend that the big sidewheel steamer *John Adams* had struck a snag on January 28, 1851. The boat sank so rapidly that most of the 123 deck passengers on board disappeared with it and were never seen again. Fortunately for the cabin passengers, the cabin had separated from the hull as the boat went down, and all of them were rescued.

Contemporary accounts of the accident gave few details. The 100 or more people who had died were mostly Irish and German immigrants and even their names were not known. Most newspapers dismissed the tragedy in a brief paragraph, and some of them were not even certain just where the accident had occurred, or why.

During the Civil War, a Union steamer called the *Sallie Wood* was captured by Confederates, stripped of everything of value, and burned at the foot of Island No. 82 in Miller Bend. Admiral David D. Porter, commander of the Union squadron, reported to the U. S. Secretary of the Navy that he had eventually captured the scoundrels responsible for the foul deed and had sent them off to Cairo to be tried by a military court.

Another Union transport, the *Crescent City*, was fired on at Miller Bend and several Union soldiers were seriously wounded. In retaliation, a Federal force was dispatched to Greenville, Mississippi, with orders to burn the town.

TARPLEY CUTOFF

Mile 543.0 AHP, Map 26

Tarpley Cutoff was constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers after a natural cutoff had already occurred at Leland Neck in 1933. The Tarpley Cutoff removed Spanish Moss Bend from the main channel of the river and shortened the navigation channel by 8.6 miles.

Spanish Moss Bend was named for the strange and picturesque plant that cannot live without the support of other plants but that is not a parasite. Zadok Cramer, in *The Navigator*, said that this "singular vegetable" made its first appearance on the Mississippi in Spanish Moss Bend, hanging from the ancient cypress trees and giving the bend a weird and spooky appearance. He described how local residents harvested the plant, which they dried and used to stuff mattresses.

Spanish Moss is related, strangely enough, to the pineapple, and although it sometimes appears to completely cover its support it does not receive any nourishment from its host and does not damage the tree on which it grows. The plant is green, and is covered with tiny gray scales that trap the dust and water that nourish the moss. Its seldom noticed flower reveals its relationship to the pineapple.

During the Spanish dominion in the Lower Mississippi Valley, a Spanish military commander named DeVillemont received a large grant of land at Spanish Moss Bend. DeVillemont died shortly after he and his family had retired to the plantation, and his heirs soon became embroiled in a controversy with the new American Government, which refused to recognize their title to the land.

American settlers took advantage of the uncertainty and set up housekeeping on DeVillemont's plantation and adopted his name for the American community that was established there. In 1833, they changed the name of the town to Columbia.

Columbia, Arkansas, was the county seat of Chicot County for a time, and served as a steamboat landing. Confederate artillery moved in to harass Union gunboats during the Civil War, and the town was burned in retaliation. Later the river removed the remains, and nothing is left of Columbia today.

LELAND CUTOFF

Mile 539.9 AHP, Map 26

On July 8, 1933, the Lower Mississippi cut its way across a narrow neck of land at Leland Plantation and abandoned its old bed in Bachelor Bend. Divorced from the river were Island No. 83 and the town of Greenville, Mississippi.