GENERAL INFORMATION

The river takes its name from the calamus plant (acorus calamus). The Sioux called the river Sinke ta wote wakpa, “food for the muskrat river.” It rises from two forks at M oon Lake and Clapper Marsh in the Sandhills. It flows even in the hottest and driest summer months because of groundwater from the underlying Ogallala Aquifer. Water seeps clear and cold from artesian wells and springs. River access is limited because the surrounding land is privately owned.

SECTION DESCRIBED

Nebraska Highway 7 to Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area — 56.6 miles.

CHARACTERISTICS

The Calamus flows slowly and gently toward its eventual destination, the 5,123-acre Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area (SRA). A sand blanket covers the streambed and renders the water relatively clear. For more than half its length, beginning at the Nebraska 7 bridge, the canoe trail is extremely meandering. Some bends in the river are nearly 360 degrees and one can look across a narrow barrier overhead in some areas — almost as if you are in a cave. As you exit the reeds, you will drop about a foot, which is a fun way to leave the marshland. Within 10-15 minutes you will come to a pipe with flowing water. This water is not potable; however, it is an interesting area on the river.

Trip ends.

Two sets of culverts are about two hours from the start. Float through the left culvert in the first set by approaching it straight on and well ahead of the culverts. If unsure, portage. From the first set of culverts to the bridge #1, a low private bridge, is one hour downstream. Portage will be necessary. From bridge #1 downstream, about a half hour, there is a second set of culverts that can be negotiated.

Bridges #2 (private) and #3 are passable; however, between the next set of culverts and bridge #4, there may be several barbed wire and electric fences. Barbed wire fences are not fun but handling them is possible. Electric fences create a completely different situation. Act as if every electric fence is “hot.” Do not take a chance if you cannot safely float under. If several electric fences are together, portage the area.

From the beginning launch site, (Nebraska Highway 7 bridge) to the first county bridge (bridge #3) is 17.6 river miles (8-9 hours). Watch for artesian wells which can be spotted in this area. Caution: Never assume water from artesian wells is potable.

Bridges #4 and #5 are county bridges. Bridge #5 is sometimes too low for passage. The second primitive campsite is before bridge #6. From bridge #3, to the second campsite on the north or left side of the river is 14.2 river miles (7-8 hours). This is a public, primitive campsite. You will pass under bridge #7 (Fox Bridge) and bridge #8 (Olson Ranch bridge) and bridge #9, before the third primitive campsite, which is 14.5 river miles (7-8 hours). This is a public, primitive campsite and is located on the Upstream Ranch and just before the low bridge #10 (Upstream Ranch Bridge). Depending on the water level, the bridge #10 may be too low to float. When in doubt, portage. Bridge #10 to bridge #11 (U.S. 183 bridge), is 5-6 hours. Access is available on the southeast, downstream right side of this bridge. From the Upstream Ranch campsite to Hannaman Bayou, in the Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area, is 10.3 river miles (6-7 hours). There is a boat ramp on the west or right side in the tail waters of the lake, as well as camping, picnic and restroom facilities. As you enter the lake’s tail waters, the stream becomes shallow. Trip ends.