

# Lower Missouri River CANOE TRAIL

## Gavins Point Dam to Ponca State Park



NEBRASKA GAME AND  
PARKS COMMISSION

PO Box 30370, Lincoln, NE 68503  
402-471-0641 • www.outdoornebraska.org

### GENERAL INFORMATION

The Missouri River begins its journey southwest of Great Falls, Montana, and ends 2,340 miles later at its confluence with the Mississippi River near St. Louis. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery followed the Missouri on their journey to the Pacific Ocean. The river frequently changed its course as it rose and fell; creating sandbars that constantly frustrated explorers and the many who followed.

Man worked for most of the past century to tame the Missouri. Six dams store runoff from rains and Rocky Mountain snowmelt to control floods and generate power. The dams also regulate flows for navigation in the lower third of the river, which was channelized for barge traffic. Two segments of the river in Nebraska, including the one described here, remain in a semi-natural state and are managed by the National Park Service as the Missouri National Recreational River.

### SECTION DESCRIBED

Nebraska Tailwaters Recreation Area, below Gavins Point Dam north of Crofton, Nebraska, to Ponca State Park — 57 river miles.

### CHARACTERISTICS

Gavins Point Dam, located just below Lewis and Clark Lake, regulates water flow on the Missouri. The amount of water discharged varies seasonally and depends on many factors, including the amount of water stored in the dams and the sale of hydroelectric power.

**Caution:** The Missouri is the deepest Nebraska river — 25 feet or more in places — and contains many hazards. Therefore, it is important to always wear a life jacket.

The river channel follows a winding course between the riverbanks. There are many islands and sandbars. Some sandbars and snags are just under the water's surface and require caution. Prevailing south winds can make this trip difficult.

**Recommendation:** Please read the General Canoeing Introduction guide before beginning. It offers a good review for the avid canoeist and a quick lesson for the novice, and may make the difference between an adventure and a nightmare.

### ACCESS SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

Only Nebraska access sites are listed, while landmarks and reference points given are on both sides of the river.

Your trip begins at the **Nebraska Tailwaters Recreation Area** below Gavins Point Dam, located 13 miles north of Crofton on Nebraska Highway 121. A boat ramp and camping facilities are available at this site.

It is 12 river miles from the Nebraska Tailwaters to the **Cedar County Park** and **St. Helena Public Boat Ramp**. Caution is required when landing at this site because of the strong current along the bank. Parking and primitive camping is available.

**Note:** The area between the Nebraska Tailwaters boat ramp and the Cedar County Park would make a wonderful afternoon float trip.

From Cedar County Park to **Brooky Bottoms** public access site is 14 river miles (3-5 hours). A private campsite is available at this location.

**Note:** An alternate access point located at the mouth of Bow Creek was purchased recently by the National Park Service and includes three-quarters of a mile of river-front and primitive camping. Goat Island, a 3-mile-long island across from Brooky Bottoms, is publicly owned and is a good place for an overnight campout. There are no facilities.

From Brooky Bottoms to **Mulberry Bend Wildlife Management Area (WMA)**, is 9 river miles (2-3 hours). There is a public boat ramp, an outhouse and a picnic table. No open fires are allowed. Primitive camping is permitted, but no potable water is available.

From Mulberry Bend WMA to **Ponca State Park** is 22 river miles (5-7 hours). The river channel moves to the Nebraska side above Ponca State Park, making access at the park's boat ramp easy. Ponca State Park has excellent camping and day-use facilities, as well as cabins for rent. Cabin reservations are essential between Memorial Day and Labor Day. A new access point is planned on Elk Point Bend north of the park. This will allow visitors to make half-day float trips that end at the park. **Trip ends** at Ponca State Park.

### SCENERY

The Nebraska Tailwaters Recreation Area is a busy fishing and camping area. Housing developments, mostly summer cabins, are scattered along either side of the Missouri River. But most of the river is wild, appearing much as it did when Lewis and Clark headed up it in 1804. Some of the landmarks that the explorers observed on their journey exist today.

The Missouri winds back and forth between high banks, alternately flowing south and east. Grassland and farmland rise above the South Dakota side of the river. On the Nebraska side, the river often runs hard against high, wooded bluffs. The unique geology of the region — orange and white chalk and gray shale — is often exposed where the river has carved away at the bluffs.

The river is dotted with sandbars, island and backwater marshes that are havens for waterfowl, shorebirds and other wildlife. Birdwatchers and others may want to stop and explore these areas, but they must remember that other than sandbars, a few islands and state recreation and wildlife areas, most of the land is privately owned and permission is required for access.

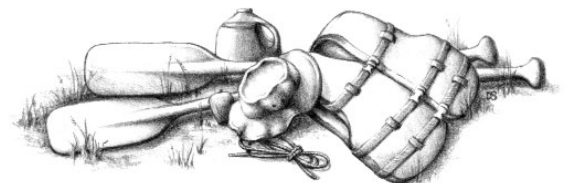
Anglers will want to bring a rod and reel. Smallmouth bass, walleye, sauger and catfish are plentiful in the river.

### COMMUNITY AND AREA INFORMATION:

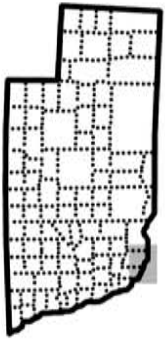
Ponca State Park (402) 755-2284  
National Park Service (402) 336-3970  
Corps of Engineers, Gavins Point Dam  
(605) 667-7875  
Yankton County Sheriff, Non-emergency,  
Yankton (605) 668-3567  
Cedar County Sheriff, Non-emergency,  
Hartington (402) 254-6884  
Dixon County Sheriff, Non-emergency,  
Ponca (402) 755-2255  
Cedar County Clerk, Hartington  
(402) 254-7411

### MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:

Avera Sacred Heart Hospital (Yankton)  
(605) 668-8100  
Vermillion Medical Center (605) 624-2611  
Ponca Medical Clinic (402) 755-2231  
**Dial 911 to reach emergency  
personnel in the area.**



# Missouri River



**Legend**

	Canoe Access Sites		Water
	Camping Sites		Boat Ramp
	Picnic Area		Visitor Center
	Restrooms		Cabins

