

# Calamus River CANOE TRAIL

NEBRASKA GAME AND  
PARKS COMMISSION

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

## 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 Moon 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 of reeds to a spot where the canoeist was a short time before. As you approach the reservoir, the bends lengthen; the river widens and becomes shallower, allowing sandbars to form. As you approach the reservoir's tail waters at Hannaman Bayou, the current slows. Early in this trip, there are two sets of culverts which are negotiable. There are 12 bridges, including three low spans that may require portaging. Watch the map and note which bridges you have passed under. Barbed wire fences are common, but a few electric fences also cross Sandhills rivers. When encountering fences, you should stop, plan your passage, and if necessary, get out of the canoe and walk under the fence or portage. Please respect private property and do not disturb the fences and bridges. They are essential to ranch operations.

**Recommendation:** Please read the General Canoeing Introduction pages before your trip. They are a good review for the avid canoeist and a quick lesson for the novice canoeist, and they might be the difference between an adventure and a nightmare.

## ACCESS SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

To follow the river by road, take the county road south of the Nebraska 7 bridge. This

road intersects with U.S. 183. Proceed on U.S. 183 southeast to bridge #11.

The initial launch site is at the Nebraska 7 bridge, located 23 miles south of Ainsworth or 18 miles north of Brewster. Access is on the northeast, downstream side of the Nebraska 7 bridge. There is limited space to pull off the highway and not enough room to leave your vehicle at this location. **Do not** take the sand trail down to the river on the southwest side of the bridge.

About 1½ hours canoeing below Highway 7, there is an area of marshland covered with tall reeds on the north or left side of the river. At one bend the water has cut into reeds. If you follow the water into this area of the reeds you will find yourself in a narrow channel which winds through vegetation for about 200 yards. The channel is barely four feet wide and the reeds close 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.

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.**

## SCENERY

The land along the river is low and gently rolling, all a part of the Sandhills (nearly 20,000 square miles of loosely compacted, windblown grass-stabilized sand dunes). There are numerous areas of marshland and oxbows with some stands of cottonwoods.

## COMMUNITY AND AREA INFORMATION:

Calamus Reservoir State Recreation Area  
(308) 346-5666  
Calamus Fish Hatchery (308) 346-4226  
(below the dam)  
Brown County Sheriff (Ainsworth)  
Non-Emergency (402) 387-1440  
Rock County Sheriff (Bassett)  
(402) 684-3811  
Loup County Sheriff (Taylor)  
(308) 942-3435  
Garfield County Sheriff (Burwell)  
Non-Emergency (308) 346-5150

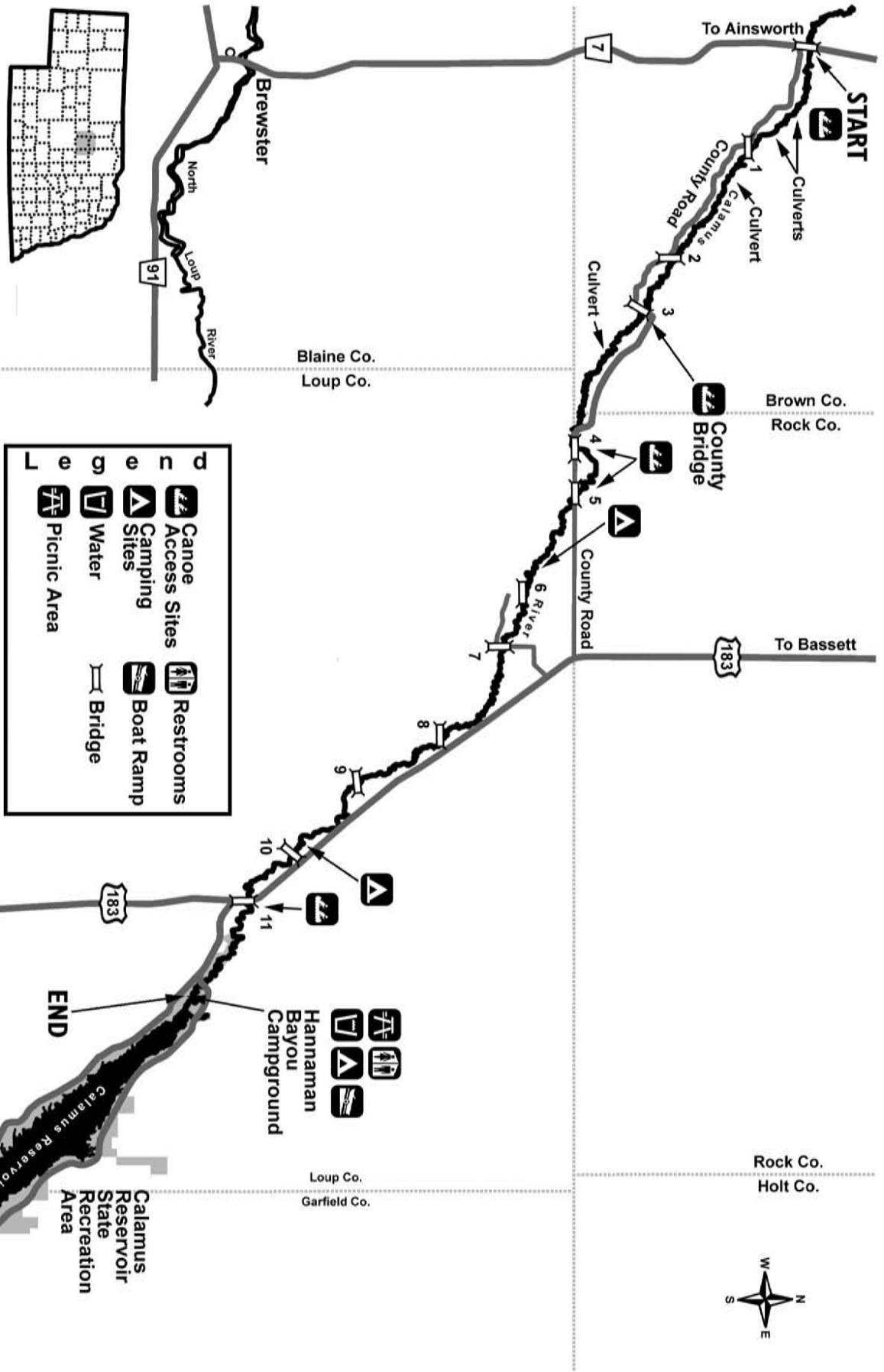
## MEDICAL INFORMATION:

Burwell Medical Clinic (308) 346-5442  
Burwell Family Practice (308) 346-5544  
Valley County Hospital (Ord)  
(308) 728-3211

**Dial 911 to reach emergency  
personnel in the area.**



# Calamus River



**Legend**

- Canoe Access Sites
- Camping Sites
- Water
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Boat Ramp
- Bridge

