

Upper Missouri River CANOE TRAIL

Ft. Randall Dam to Niobrara



NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION

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

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Missouri begins its journey southwest of Great Falls, Montana, ending 2,400 miles later at the confluence with the Mississippi River near St. Louis. Early explorer Father Marquette described the Missouri as "frightful" and referred to it as *Pekitanoui*, Sak Indian for "muddy water." Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery followed the Missouri on their mission to the Pacific Ocean. It was known for two characteristics; by its murkiness, dubbed "Big Muddy," and by an army of floating trees and large branches that acted as battering rams and spelled doom for many steamboats. The river frequently changed its course as it rose and fell, creating sandbars that constantly frustrated river boat captains.

Man worked for most of the past century to tame the Missouri. Six dams store runoff from rains and 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. But from Fort Randall Dam to Ponca State Park, 98 miles, including the section described here, remain in a semi-natural state and have been designated as the Missouri National Recreational River and managed by the National Park Service.

SECTION DESCRIBED

Ft. Randall Dam to the Village of Niobrara — 37 miles.

CHARACTERISTICS

Flow on this section of the river is regulated by Fort Randall Dam and the amount of water released depends on many factors, including the amount accumulated above the dams from the Rocky Mountains snow melt, upriver precipitation, and sales of hydroelectric power. The water discharge rate can change hourly. The normal rate of flow is between 3 to 5 mph while in periods of high water it can attain 7 mph or more.

Caution: The Missouri is the deepest of Nebraska rivers, 25 feet or more in some places. It is important that you wear a life jacket at all times.

This river is tamer now than in Marquette's time, however, debris, logs, and silt still wash into the river.

The river follows a braided and winding course, with the channel alternating between the shorelines. There are many sandbars and islands. A few private islands exist. Most islands are covered with willows and cottonwoods, or are marshland covered with reeds and cattails.

Recommendation: Please read the General Canoeing Introduction pages before beginning. They offer 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

Your trip will begin at the **Randall Creek Recreation Area** just below the Ft. Randall dam on the south side of the river. Take **U.S. Highway 281** and turn to the right before the dam on a paved access road. This road extends through a recreation area, which has a double boat ramp, camping, picnic and restroom facilities.

The distance from the dam to the **Sunshine Bottoms access** is 13.4 river miles (4.5 to 6.5 hours). From this access area to the primitive campsite is less than one mile downstream. Watch for the large sign visible on the south side of the river. To drive to this boat ramp follow **Nebraska 12**, 4 miles west of Monowi or 2 ½ miles east of Lynch, to a "Sunshine Bottom" sign which will direct you north, down a graveled road which may not be passable during wet weather.

From Sunshine Bottom to **Verdel Landing** is 15 river miles (5 to 7½ hours). To drive to this boat ramp follow Nebraska 12, and turn north at the **Lazy River Acres** sign, approximately 8 miles west of the town of Niobrara. This graveled county road leads you directly to the area. There is a pit toilet at this site. This boat launching area can be busy, but is an excellent canoe access site.

Another 6 miles downstream from the Verdel Landing SRA you can see the

Niobrara State Park on the right, south bluffs. This park has excellent camping and day-use facilities, and is located two miles west of the Village of Niobrara.

Downstream from Niobrara State Park, on your right, you will see a former railroad bridge, now a hiking trail; which indicates the point where the Niobrara River empties into the Missouri River. Downstream from this bridge, on the south side of the Missouri River is marshland. Stay on the south side of the Missouri River and watch for two larger waterways on the south, right, downstream side. Take the second waterway which will take you directly to the **Village of Niobrara boat landing**.

From the Verdel Landing SRA to the Village of Niobrara boat ramp is 8 river miles (2.5 - 4 hours). A graveled road leading to the boat ramp might not be passable during wet weather. There is another access site about one mile downstream, on the right, upstream side of the **Standing Bear Bridge**. This is an old paddle-boat landing area and is accessible only from the same gravel road continuing east from the Village boat ramp. **Trip ends.**

SCENERY

The valley ranges from one to two miles wide and in some areas is flanked by nearly vertical limestone cliffs and loess bluffs, more than 250 feet above the river. Some of the landmarks that Lewis and Clark observed on their journey exist today. Heavy stands of willow and cottonwood trees are found near the water, and hardwood forests grow on the steeper, upland slopes. Numerous species of fish, including walleye, sauger, paddlefish, sturgeon, northern pike, small-mouth and largemouth bass are found in the river, while deer, fox, coyotes, mink, eagles, and turkeys are a few of the animals and birds that occupy its bottom lands.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION:

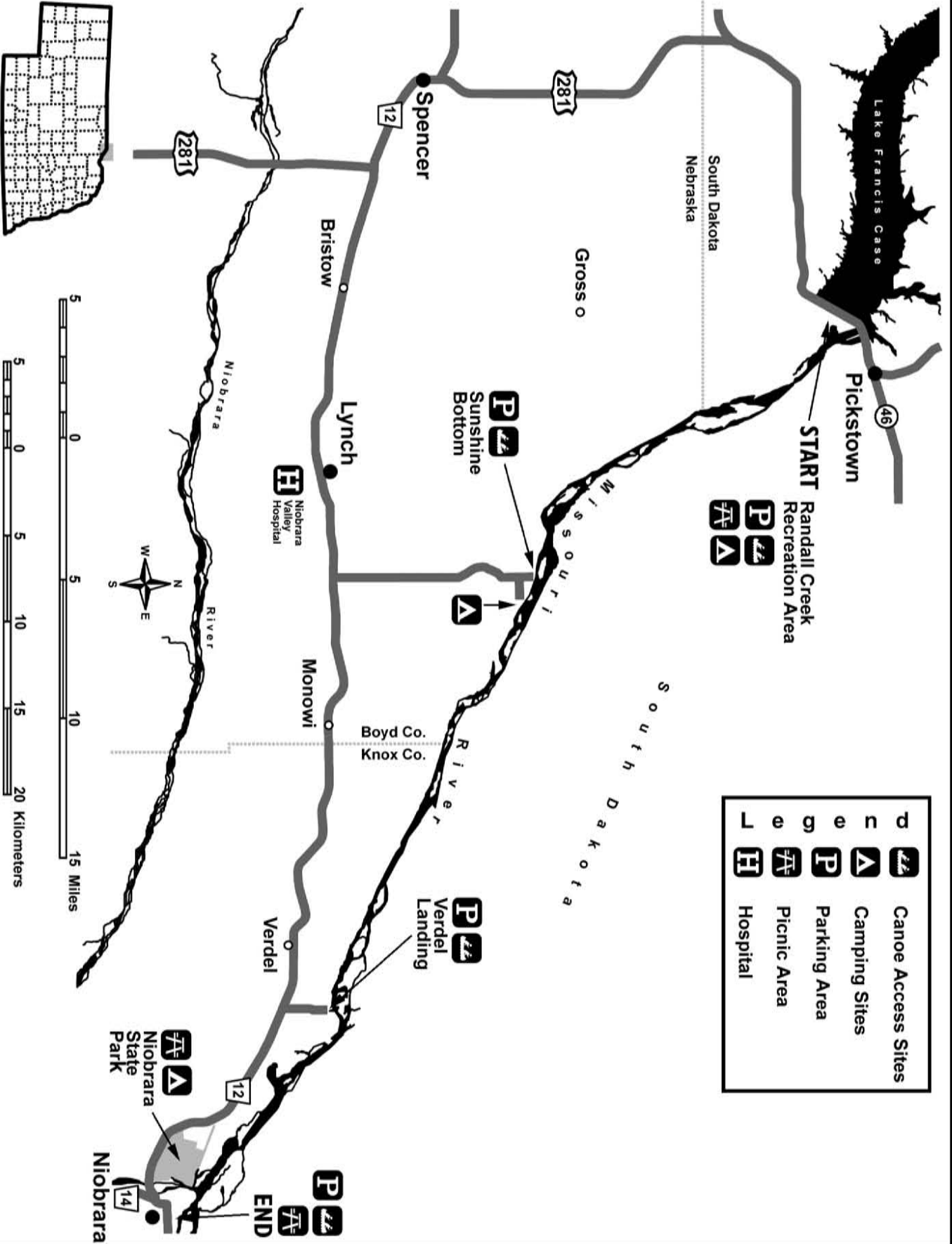
Niobrara State Park (402) 857-3373
Boyd County Sheriff (Butte)
Non-Emergency (402) 775-2331
Knox County Sheriff (Center)
Non-Emergency (402) 288-4261
Niobrara Police Dept. (Niobrara)
Non-Emergency (402) 857-3581

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE:

Niobrara Valley Medical Clinic (Spencer)
(402) 589-1580
Niobrara Valley Hospital (Lynch)
(402) 569-2451
Niobrara Medical Clinic (Niobrara)
(402) 857-3398

Dial 911 to reach emergency personnel in the area.

Upper Missouri River



	Canoe Access Sites
	Camping Sites
	Parking Area
	Picnic Area
	Hospital

5 0 5 10 15 20 Miles
15 Kilometers



5 0 5 10 15 20 Kilometers

