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## Review of *What the River Carries: Encounters with the Mississippi, Missouri, and Platte* by Lisa Knopp

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**What the River Carries: Encounters with the Mississippi, Missouri, and Platte.** By Lisa Knopp. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012. xiv + 230 pp. References. \$19.95 paper.

The best way to fall in love with rivers is to have a relationship with them. Lisa Knopp does this by looking, experiencing, and contemplating what each river looked like in its wild state; how historical and contemporary travelers viewed them; how they were named; how First Americans lived near and depended upon them; how industry and agriculture have used them; what each river is like after two centuries of human tinkering and engineering; and how the culture, politics, and philosophy of people living along these rivers continue to be shaped by them.

Born and raised along the Mississippi near Burlington in southeastern Iowa, Knopp naturally engages as an insider to experience and learn the history of the First Americans and immigrants who settled along the river. In an age of expansion, 1,476 steamboats plied the Mississippi and docked at the St. Louis wharf in 1839, but by 1872 only 147 steamboats passed beneath the Burlington Railroad Bridge. Prior to 1890, mussel beds resembled cobblestones on the riverbed; overexploitation by the button industry decimated them by 1900.

In Lewis and Clark's day, the Missouri River was productive and self-sustaining. In spite of an expanding country and early wishful thinking by some that the river should be "tamed," major floods occurred in 1844, 1881, 1903, 1927, 1937, 1952, 1967, 1978, 1993, and 2011—and will continue into the future. "The Taking" essay about "White Swan" on the Yankton Sioux Reservation is especially acute regarding the Native lifestyle dependent upon the river, including a rich naming of the natural plants and foods supporting the tribal way of life.

The Platte, cutting across the Great Plains region, is the last river the author fell in love with. She asks: Is a river still a river if it has no water? Knopp moved from outsider to insider when she moved to Nebraska. While outsider views tend to be simple, one-dimensional, and acquired through collected rather than innate knowledge, insiders have a long-lived intimacy to perceive relationships and depths. Because of her dual status, she sees the astonishing diversity in the Land of the Platte. The State of Nebraska filed suit and won against the Rural Electrification Association and the Laramie River Power Station on a tributary to the North Platte in Wyoming based on the fact that the sponsor and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were compromising habitat of endangered species in the central Platte and were in violation of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. A major three-state recovery program to return water to this valuable Great Plains river for listed species is presently under way.

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