

Mouse Valley (*Souris River*)

A VANTAGE POINTS FLASHBACK

Who am I? I've been the same for thousands of years. But, I'm changing all the time. I love traveling – following the same route repeatedly - 700 kms from southeast Saskatchewan, down through North Dakota and across southwest Manitoba to the Assiniboine River.

Because I'm lazy, I insist on going downhill the whole way, a total of 500 meters from top to bottom, which means I travel leisurely. Unless, of course, it rains heavily, or the snow melts quickly. Then, I get kinda' nasty.

I'm the Souris River. Famous in these parts, because of how important I've been for people since the Ice Age. For 10,000 years there were no hard-packed roads or railroads. People used walking and riding trails. And, they used rivers. Like me!

Oh, I've seen some busy days. Like 250 years ago, French fur traders partnered with Nakota trappers to export beaver pelts to Montreal and Europe. The French gave me my current name, 'Soo-ree', which means '*mouse*'.

The easiest way to move pelts was downstream with freighter canoes. Fur companies set up trading posts along my banks where furs and bison pelts were collected for their journeys east. The first post was Ash House of the XY company in 1795. Later the Hudson's Bay, the Northwest Company, and many independent traders erected posts – including some American traders who claimed I was totally in the USA. There were as many as 18 trading posts on my banks.

My most famous trading post was Fort Mr. Grant, built in 1824, by a Metis gentleman. He placed his post a short distance upstream of today's Hartney.

Mr. Grant got my attention when he attacked the American posts. The Hudson's Bay Company hired surveyors to mark the border and appointed Mr. Grant 'Warden of the Plains' with instructions to keep American traders out of my valley. Within a year, the Americans gave up. Youhee! Mr. Grant made fur fly!

In early days of Euro Settlement, travelers crossed over me at natural crossings: Sourisford, Melita and Lang's. These were

tough to get through, though, when I was high.



The trail to Lang's Crossing is still used by hikers and equestrians.

So enterprising humans provided ferry services. But even these didn't satisfy human desires to cross quickly. So, bridges began popping up, at least 12 between Coulter and Wawanesa, which is good for humans I guess, but they sure cut down on my entertainment!



The Souris Bend Wildlife Management Area - stunning, largely unspoiled, wilderness.

So, I adjust. Focus on what's always been true. Animals and adventurers are attracted to rivers. Please, launch your canoe, raft or kayak at riverside and in the blink of an eye, find yourself in Souris Bend Wildlife Area. It's like you're traveling with me 300 years ago.

Deer, elk, eagles, geese, turtles, alligators, (well, not quite that exotic!) all share my goodness.

Bon Voyage!

David Neufeld