

# Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No. 279

## Tuesday, March 10, 2015

### RIP:

Paddle's are up in memorial  
of a couple of Memphis sailors  
who went out and didn't come back.  
Both are now sailing the seven rivers  
beyond the edges of the earth.

*James R. Ray, 1940-2015*

*Our condolences to the friends and family of "JR" James R. Ray, a colorful Memphis river rat who amongst many other occupations drove shuttles for the Quapaw Canoe Company in the Memphis area. JR was known for his amazing tales of love, life and survival on the Mississippi River which grew better with each telling. For example, JR once told me that he saved his boat when the motor died by stripping naked, gripping the bow line in his teeth, diving into the muddy water, and swimming it to shore fighting the strong currents swirling down Mud Island. Another one of JR's reoccurring tales involved surfing the waves behind an upstream tow and inadvertently powering his speedboat over the waves to land squarely on the back deck of the 3-screw tow. The pilot was not happy. See below for complete obituary.*

*Wim Nouwen, 1964-2015*

*Our condolences to the Memphis outdoors community for the recent loss of Wim Nouwen, a seasoned kayaker who loved the river and was loved by many. Wim's tragedy underscores the need for extreme caution when paddling the dangerous springtime waters on the Mississippi River. This is especially true on warm sunny days when everything seems safe and friendly. Any problems might lead to hypothermia or cold-water shock. See below for complete Obituary.*

## Mark River's Dream

It was 2011, the floodwaters are receding St. Louis. I returned to my home, a block from the Mississippi River, from my usual night shift and follow my usual routine by lighting the grill before going into the house to grab a fillet of salmon I had prepared and marinated the night before. I grab a refreshment and continue on to my porch and gaze across the street as a brood of turkeys graze in the hillside. A normal sight in this neighborhood, snuggled between the Chain of Rocks and downtown St. Louis. It's been more sightings during the Flood. Animals were pushed into the neighborhoods by the rising water and most of them took refuge in the old quarry next to Bob Casilly's Cementland, which is one block from my home. It was a great time for river lovers like myself. I would sit on my porch in the late night before work and see wildlife walk the streets. Coyotes, deer, bobcats, and one night, a cougar; trying to hunt in the cover of darkness before the humans awake at sunrise. It's nine in the morning and as usual, I could hear Bob Casilly's bulldozer start. I quickly remember to check my salmon, when a vehicle with a trailer attached pulls in front of my home. The guy in the drivers seat yells, "I love the smell of your BBQ everyday at my house around the corner." I say, "thanks", and rush to my grill. There were two kids on the trailer yelling, "I'm black and I'm proud!" I give them symbol of unity and retrieve my salmon.

I eat my salmon, thinking about the friendly encounter, then prepare for my daily visit to the Mississippi River. I grab my fishing pole, trash bags, and walked down to the river. The riverfront is still very saturated

with hundreds of puddles and small ponds full of frog eggs and bait fish. The locals have already harvested all the large fish from the ponds and the shore birds and scavengers are finishing the job. There's roadkill everywhere, along the busy highway, parallel to the river. Herons and egrets stand side by side feasting. Belted kingfishers fly acrobatically from puddle to puddle. The sounds of nature fill the air. I smile and take a deep breath of air, it seems smiles are hard to come by these days.

It's an unusual day at the river. The river is just under the cut-banks and moving at a high speed. Most of the fishermen are standing by a small lake fishing hard. Apparently, a local fisherman caught a 67 lb catfish and word got around town. The diehard river fishermen are fishing the main channel battling an incredibly strong current. As usual, some fisherman are leaving beer cans and tangled fishing line everywhere; so I start to clean up. I consider this my section of the river and I always keep it clean. All of a sudden, my emotions overwhelm me; I figured it out, I'm not happy. I'm not happy with work and I feel like my work ethic could be better used for humanity. I think to myself, "I have to find a way of taking care of this river!"

I sit with my head in my hands staring at Cementland, but more than anything, focusing on the landlocked and empty boat sitting high on the hill surrounding the establishment. It was where Bob Casilly lived while coming up with the idea for his biggest project to date. I say to myself, "that's how I feel, landlocked and empty." I looked to the sky angrily and say, "If I'm not part of your plan, do away with my existence, please!" I rise and head home; I shouldn't be in public today.

That evening, instead of sleeping before work, I sat on my porch and made a decision about my life. I decided to cash in all my vacation and take a leave of absence from work. My boss was happy to grant it, because it would save on payroll and he could hire three part timers for cheaper than what they were paying me.

The following day, sitting on my porch, I realize that I have to find my way to the river. I had just made a bold move and everyone in my circle was concerned. There were whispers that I had gone crazy. My family and friends started distancing themselves from me. I was alone, but not lonely; I had the River. I also felt the presence of my grandfather that day. He loved this porch, and at one moment, I thought I smelled his favorite whiskey. "White Lightning", they called it; maybe I am going crazy. I felt comfortable knowing he was there with me.

A loud truck comes rambling down the street. I knew this truck and it was the last person I wanted to see. He was a neighbor of my father and did mechanic work for him. He pulls up yelling, "I heard you was unemployed like me!" I yelled back, "I'm not unemployed!" It's funny how the wrong news travels so fast. He yells, "Who cares, you wanna go fishing?" I sit silent. This is the last person I should be with. Every time we go fishing he gets arrested. He refuses to get a fishing or drivers license. He rides around in a noisy truck, breaking every rule possible. He had warrants out for his arrest in every county in St. Louis because he would never go to court. He never put trash in the trash can, but for some reason beyond me, I said "yes-but I'm driving!"

We head for my favorite fishing spot, located just below the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers at the kayak access, just below Duck Island. The place was barely dry enough to get to, as we made the approach. There were thousands, yes thousands, of frogs covering the small patch of woods leading to the sandbar. Snakes of all kinds were slithering over our boots with frogs in their mouths. The crazy thing was, they paid no mind to us. It was the time of plenty for all species. It didn't take long for us to start arguing, as he's standing right next to the trash can and throws a beer bottle in the woods. I trek in the woods to retrieve the bottle, when I hear a voice say, "Thanks neighbor, I'm glad it's more than just me that cares." It ends up being my neighbor from two days before. He startled me because there was no other vehicles around. We talk for a second, but he has to go attend to some kids on the other side of the wing dike. Curiosity forces me to go check

it out, but it's too late, as I see him and a lot of kids floating away in a huge, beautiful, wooden strip canoe; eventually disappearing around the bend.

That night I didn't sleep a wink. I tossed and turned. I prayed to the Creator. I asked him to give me an opportunity to work on the river. A chance to work for humanity, not corporations. I get out of bed and get dressed. The sun is two hours from rising, but I can't wait. I have to find that canoe! With the sun barely peeking above the horizon, I hurry to the river. I knew something was there. I ventured over to a private area owned by Bob, and there it was. The river is still high, flowing fast, and that beautiful canoe was tied to two big cottonwoods. The ropes were taut, as if the boat was trying to break loose. The water was too dangerous to swim, but remember, I'm crazy, and decide to straddle the rope out to the canoe. If I didn't make it, my family would be reading about me in the newspaper tomorrow. The canoe was beautiful. I crawled into the bow, where a large "Q" was branded into the wall of the floatation chamber with the name "John Ruskey." I sat there and waited all day. Went home, ate dinner, came back; it was gone. It felt like a dream, an aberration of the river. Am I going crazy?

The next few weeks, I would ride my bike around the neighborhood looking for this guy named Big Muddy Mike. Then finally, one day, I see those two young kids moving canoes in a backyard. That's got to be it! The weeks following, we would paddle over to Mosenthein Island and take clients. I started to get my paddle stroke down. I developed a work out plan and got an operation on my knee because I knew change was near. I finally got the nerve to ask him about who John Ruskey was. He explained the canoe business and Bob Casilly's plans to revitalize our neighborhood with his art theme park, Cementland. There would be bikes and canoes. People would come from all over. I was in!

Unfortunately, we lost Bob to a bulldozer accident that next month and everything stopped. Fortunately, Mike asked me to go to Woodville, Mississippi, to cover a job for his friend, "Driftwood Johnnie" John Ruskey. We did the job and I got to meet John. He gratefully sent me back to St. Louis with a stack of books. I read them all and called Driftwood for an opportunity to become an apprentice. He mailed me the application and gave me a chance. I flew to Boston for help from my brother Earl and his wife, Charlotte. The only people in my family that supported my decision without judgement. As I packed my bags to come to Clarksdale, I knew I wasn't coming back. That day, I realized that every weight I lifted, every sprint I ran, and all the trials and tribulations I overcame, was getting me ready to be a steward for the Mississippi River.

Be true to yourself, have faith in the Creator and humanity, and you will find your way.

-Mark River

*St. Louis born Mark "River" Peoples is a river guide and youth leader with the Quapaw Canoe Company. Mark grew up hunting and fishing along the river with his father. Mark is the Southern Region leader for 1 Mississippi ([www.1Mississippi.org](http://www.1Mississippi.org)) and also serves on the board of the Lower Mississippi River Foundation. When not on the water, Mark mentors Delta youth and educates them on the importance of the protection and preservation of our national treasure for generations to come. Mark works hard on changing the perception of our great River and its tributaries. Through river trips, cleanups, and workshops, Mark's goal is overall systemic health of the Mississippi River.*

**RIP Wim Nouwen, 1964-2015**

Wim Nouwen, physical therapist and professional kayak instructor, died on February 22, 2015. His death was attributed to an accident while kayaking on the Mississippi River. Wim devoted his life to his family, to healing and teaching in his physical therapy work and to kayaking. As a committed family man, he freely expressed his devotion to his beloved wife, Julie, and to his 14-year-old daughter, Crystal. Wim was born in Budel, the Netherlands, on November 16, 1964 to Wil and Ria Nouwen. He attended schools in Holland, earning a Master's degree in Physical Therapy. He wrote his thesis on the subject of kayaking injuries. He was a member of the Dutch National Kayaking team. He also served in the military in Holland and worked in Germany prior to coming to the United States in 1993 and settling in Memphis. He was widely known in the field of physical therapy for his compassionate care and his teaching ability. His commitment was to the correction of physical injuries in order to bring about healing and to teaching preventive measures to avoid further injuries. He excelled in this capacity. During his career he worked at Baptist Hospital Rehabilitation, Galloway Nursing Home, Holborn Integrated Therapy, and most recently at Primacy Rehabilitation Center. As an outstanding kayaker, Wim was recognized for his excellent paddling skills, not just in Memphis but across the country. After displaying these skills from his classic kayaking background acquired in Holland, he quickly became a part of the local paddling community. One member of that group described him as "a humble man, with no trace of egoism, and who comported himself as a gentle giant in the field of kayaking. Memphis has lost an iconic member of the outdoors community". He was certified by the American Canoe and Kayaking Association, and taught beginning, mid-level, and advanced classes under the auspices of Outdoors, Inc. In recent years, Wim won the Natchez Phat River Challenge 45-mile race and the Vicksburg Bluz Cruz 20-mile race. He also competed in Outdoors, Inc. races along with Olympic gold medal participants. He is survived by his wife, Julie, and daughter, Crystal; his parents Wil and Ria Nouwen; and his sisters Gerti Nouwen and May Nouwen. There will be a visitation on Friday, February 27 from 4 to 6 p.m. at Canale Funeral Directors, 2700 Union Avenue Extended. A reception will follow at the Trolley Stop, 704 Madison Avenue. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to The Wolf River Conservancy at P. O. Box 11031, Memphis, TN 38111. See more at:

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/commercialappeal/obituary.aspx?pid=174256298#sthash.kCoweLLy.dpuf>

## **RIP James R. Ray, 1940-2015**

James R. Ray, 75, of Memphis, TN passed away March 3, 2015. James was a longtime employee of International Harvester/Navistar until his retirement. More recently, he worked part-time for the Stagehand Union. James was a loving husband to Reda Ray; although he didn't rejoin her on March 1st for their 52nd anniversary, she did come to get him on March 3rd. He was an awesome dad to his daughter, Dana McFeeters (Ray) of Bartlett, as well as to many neighborhood children who looked to him for advice. James was a friend to everyone he met. His friends called him the "Mayor of McKeller Lake" because James could always be found there or on the river on the weekend. James enjoyed boating and was one of the charter members of the Mid-South Power Boat Club as well as the Southern Drag Boat Association. He was an avid fan of the Memphis Tigers and just enjoyed having a good time. In addition to his daughter, he leaves behind two grandchildren, Shayna Philpot (Weston) of Yuma, AZ and Zach Wells of Bartlett. There will be a memorial visitation at Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens, 3700 N Germantown Road, Bartlett, TN 38133 on Saturday, March 7, 2015 from 3:30-5:00 p.m. with a memorial service following at 5:00 p.m. Online condolences may be expressed by visiting [www.memphisfuneralhome.net](http://www.memphisfuneralhome.net)

## **Atchafalaya Expedition, March 16-27th**

Now filling seats in the big canoe for the March Atchafalaya Expedition, March 16-27th, Leave from Fort Adams, pass through the Old River Lock, confluence with the Red River, head down the Atchafalaya, the famed "River of Trees," America's Largest River-Swamp, lots of bayous and back channels to explore, annual

songbird migration in full swing, three distinct biotas including bottomland hardwood forest, tupelo gum-cypress swamps, and ocean marshes, paddle to the Gulf of Mexico, investigate sediment accretion in Atchafalaya Delta and Wax Lake Outlet, where America's mud is helping rebuild Louisiana and the coasts are getting bigger in the natural river delta process, take out in Morgan City. Contact John Ruskey [john@island63.com](mailto:john@island63.com) for more information.

## **Rivergator Expeditions you can join in 2015:**

### March 16-27, 2015: Atchafalaya River Expedition

From Three Rivers WMA to the Gulf of Mexico

159 miles of wild exploration through the 2 million acre "River of Trees" via Simmesport, Krotz Springs, Flat Lake and Morgan City with side trips down mysterious side channels and bayous, and fantastic birding, amphibians, and adventures along the way!

### April 15-30, 2015: Baton Rouge to the Gulf of Mexico

225 miles downstream through the Chemical Corridor (AKA Cancer Alley) down the biggest inland harbor in the world, including Plaquemine, Morganza Floodway, Donaldsonville, Bonnet Carre Spillway, New Orleans, Algiers, Belle Chasse, Venice, Pilot-Town, Mile Zero, Head of Passes, Birdsfoot Delta, last camp will be a sandy beach on the Gulf of Mexico! (Note: bring your haz mat suit and respirator, or we will supply).

### October/November 2015: St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico

1180 miles on the Middle and Lower Mississippi River! Start: Missouri River Confluence. End: salty waters of the Caribbean.

*To enjoy the three previous installments (including photos) from 2014 Rivergator Expeditions, please go to:*

Blind Faith in the Last Cold Light of the Day

<http://mailman.305spin.com/view/?cid=40&sid=271&uid=7&lid=208>

Muddy Guitar String 1,000 Miles Long

<http://mailman.305spin.com/view/?cid=40&sid=272&uid=7&lid=209>

Bittersweet Tinges in a Watery Wilderness

<http://mailman.305spin.com/view/?cid=40&sid=273&uid=1944&lid=210>

## **-- Juke Joint Festival 2015 --**

Canoe-Carving Demonstration & Workshop. Paddling on the Sunflower River. Sunflower River Camping. 1Mississippi -- Can the River Count on You? GRIOT and GREENS. Sunday Daytrip on the Mighty

Mississippi!

## **Quapaw Canoe Company**

### **Activities During**

### **2015 Juke Joint Festival April 9-12**

#### **Canoe-Carving Demonstration & Workshop**

#### **Paddling on the Sunflower River**

#### **Sunflower River Camping**

#### **1Mississippi -- Can the River Count on You?**

#### **GRIOT and GREENS**

#### **Sunday Daytrip on the Mighty Mississippi**

Most events will meet & take place street level 3rd & Sunflower in downtown Clarksdale all day 9 - 4pm every day Wednesday April 8th – Saturday April 11th, Mississippi River Daytrip 1pm - 7pm Sunday April 12th. For more information contact Quapaw Canoe Company 662-627-4070 or [john@island63.com](mailto:john@island63.com).

#### **Canoe-Carving Demonstration & Workshop**

Quapaw Canoe Company

9 am to 4 pm Wednesday - Saturday

Location: Quapaw Canoe Company, 289 Sunflower (Third Street & Sunflower, opposite GRIOT Arts). Contact: 662-627-4070 or 902-7841. Catfish Dugout Canoe carving from 3-ton cottonwood log. Partnership with Spring Initiative and GRIOT ARTS youth programs. This project supported by the Mississippi Arts Commission. All ages welcome. We provide instruction, tools and safety equipment. Children under 12 must be accompanied by parents. Contact: Quapaw Canoe Company 662-627-4070 or [john@island63.com](mailto:john@island63.com).

#### **Paddling on the Sunflower River**

Quapaw Canoe Company

9 am to 4 pm Wednesday - Saturday (Pick your time and stay out as long as you want)

Canoe or kayak or SUP. Paddle the beautiful (and muddy!) Sunflower River through downtown Clarksdale with the “back-door view” of Red’s Lounge, The Riverside Hotel. Possible run through a Delta Wilderness with a take-out at Hopson Plantation. Meet Location: Quapaw Canoe Company, 289 Sunflower (Third Street & Sunflower, opposite Sarah’s Kitchen). Contact: 662-627-4070 or 902-7841. See below for options & rates.

#### **Sunflower River Camping**

Quapaw Canoe Company

Wednesday - Sunday

Quapaw Canoe Company will be hosting a public campground downtown for tents campers. No trailers or

RVs. Porta-Johns and hot showers on location. Camp on grassy sites along the banks of the Sunflower River! Easy access to downtown Clarksdale and all the stages and juke joints. Everything within walking distance! \$25/tent/night for 2 people, \$10 each additional person/night. 2 night minimum. Bring your own tent and sleeping bags. Parking for 1 vehicle per tent. (You can find close by parking elsewhere). Contact: Mark "River" Peoples 662-902-1885. Quapaw Canoe Company 662-627-4070 or [john@island63.com](mailto:john@island63.com).

## **1Mississippi -- Can the River Count on You?**

Quapaw Canoe Company

9 am to 4 pm Wednesday - Saturday

Ongoing Exhibit and Southern campaign headquarters for the 1Mississippi River Citizen Program. Come on over and learn about how you can help protect and better the waters of America, our drinking water, swimming water & lifeblood of the nation. Become a River Citizen and join us in making the Mississippi River sparkle like the beautiful "Queen of Rivers" that she is.

## **GRIOT and GREENS (Saturday 11am-2pm)**

Fresh greens collected and cooked by the youth involved in the GRIOT ARTS program. Fresh Greens Cookoff. Vegetarian options. \$5/bowl of greens, proceeds to go to support of the GRIOT ARTS program.

## **Sunday April 12th, Mississippi River Daytrip 1-7pm (Sunday Only)**

Meet at 1pm at Quapaw headquarters 289 Sunflower Avenue in downtown Clarksdale gear up, and then shuttle to Montezuma Landing, which is directly above Friars Point. We'll paddle by the beautiful warm light of mid-day to Island 61 where we'll make swim stop and watch the sun rotate over the waters of Old Town Bend. Shortly thereafter we'll follow the river downstream over the main channel of the Mississippi as it makes the turbulent escapade below Kangaroo Point. After supper, we'll push off into the shimmering waters of the river, the darkness of the boils highlighted by shining whirl lines, boil lines, and low angle sun reflections. By the last light of the day we'll paddle around Old Town Bend, and then silently slip in between Is. 62 and 63. Sometime around sunset we'll cut into the channel below Island 63 and meet our shuttle driver Ellis Coleman "Mr. Smooth Dancer" at Quapaw Landing. Call ahead to make your reservation. \$125/person includes guiding, outfitting and shuttle. Live music on board! Potluck Supper. Bring a loaf of bread, a salad, or a rack of ribs to share. BYOB. 662-627-4070 or [john@island63.com](mailto:john@island63.com).

## **Description: Paddling on the Sunflower River**

**Intro:** Beautiful paddling through downtown Clarksdale, and upstream & downstream as well. Re-discover Clarksdale from its main artery, the Sunflower River. Back-door view of riverbank blues places like Red's Juke Joint and the historic Riverside Hotel. Get close to Mississippi Delta Wildlife such as fish, turtles, snakes, frogs, song birds, birds of prey (mainly hawks & owls) wading birds & other waterfowl, occasional deer, possum, armadillos, raccoon & beaver. Flat water. Easy paddling. Guide service available. Do your own paddling & shuttling or we can provide canoes, kayaks and shuttle service. See below.

## **5 paddling options on the Sunflower River:**

**1) Downtown Clarksdale "Back-Door Blues Shuffle & Turnaround"** (1-3 miles): Start off downstream under the Railroad Bridge and paddle behind Delta Hardware (Charlie Musselwhite CD), Ground Zero Blues

Club, Red's Juke Joint, Martin Luther King Park, the Riverside Hotel (where Bessie Smith died in 1937), and make a u-turn under the Blues Highway 61. Paddle back. Flexible timing, you decide how fast you want to paddle, and how soon you want to turn around. Leave from Sunflower Landing (behind Quapaw Canoe Company).

**2) Downtown Parks & Wilderness (1-3 miles):** Paddle upstream behind City Hall, around Soldier's Field and enter the rich Cypress forest hidden along the banks of the river. You will be amazed by the variety of wildlife in this thriving floodplain ecosystem. Commonly seen are egrets, great blue herons, red eared turtles, mississippi map turtle, needlenose gar, red shouldered hawk, beaver and river otter. Paddle up to the Duckwalk Park and make turnaround for a leisurely paddle back downstream. Leave from Sunflower Landing (behind Quapaw Canoe Company).

**3) Clark Park to Sunflower Landing (3 miles)** Leisurely 3 mile paddle into downtown Clarksdale through some of the woods & neighborhoods north of town. Owls & beavers. Paddle through the cypress, oaks & sycamores of the Duck Walk. You've never seen downtown until you've seen it from the river! Put-in at Clark Park (Lee Drive & Friars Point Road). Take out at Sunflower Landing (Public Parking just downstream of 2nd Street Bridge). Shuttle available.

**4) Clover Hill to Sunflower Landing (10 miles)** 3-4 hours of paddling. Wild & remote-feeling. Great views of Coahoma County as it used to look. Paddle through woods & fields for miles and not see anyone. No people or buildings until you get close to Clarksdale. Lots of deer, ducks, owls, hawks, and migrating birds. Put in at bridge near Clover Hill. (turn off Friars Point Road at Kenoy's and go East half mile on Farrell-Eagle's Nest Road. Park on SE side of the 2nd Bridge. Put in below bridge. Take out at Sunflower Landing (Public Parking just downstream of 2nd Street Bridge)

**5) Sunflower Landing to Hopson (6 miles)** 2-3 hours of paddling. Leave downtown Clarksdale and paddle under the Railroad Bridge behind Delta Wholesale Hardware, Red's Juke Joint, the Riverside Hotel, 61 Highway – you will see why the Sunflower River has the blues! The river alternates between short narrow passages with clogged channels through submerged trees and long pools bordered by big trees and wide fields. The banks are thick with hawks, owls & deer. Put in Sunflower Landing (Public Parking just downstream of 2nd Street Bridge). Take out at Hopson Bridge

## **Rental & Shuttle Rates**

Canoe Rental Half Day: \$35/canoe with paddles & life jackets for 2 people

Canoe Rental Full Day: \$70/canoe with paddles & life jackets for 2 people

Kayak or SUP Rental: \$35/person/trip with paddle & life jacket

Shuttle Rates (per person with canoes & kayaks):

Sunflower Landing – Clark Park: \$15

Sunflower Landing – Clover Hill: \$25

Sunflower Landing – Hopson: \$25



20% off for Friends of the Sunflower River in current good standing!!!

## **Who Are the Friends of the Sunflower River?**

Friends of the Sunflower River is all about appreciating and caring for the lonely little river that winds its way through the center of the Mississippi Delta, from Friars Point to Clarksdale, from Mound Bayou & Merigold to Sunflower; from Indianola to Anguilla, from Holly Bluff to Vicksburg.

This river has the blues! Besides the many blues & gospel musicians who were born & baptized along its banks, its mussel shell beds (which are reported to be the richest such biota in the world) seem to be in constant danger of overzealous engineering. The Sunflower River has been neglected and over-worked; so much that it was proclaimed America's "Most Endangered River" in 2003.

The good news is that its forests constitute the largest bottomland hardwood forests in the National Forest system (they also produce the highest carbon-sequestration of any forests in North America!), and its banks are home to every creature winged, webbed or otherwise, found native to the Mississippi Delta. It's a beautiful place to get away, to reflect a moment on the rivers and woods of America, to walk along its banks, to paddle its waters, to enjoy its scenery. Most importantly, its home to all of us who live on or near its banks, and second home to many others who love it from a distance. Shouldn't we be taking better care of our lonely muddy river?

**Physical Description:** The Sunflower River is born in the bayous and lakes of Northern Coahoma County and meanders South some 250 miles through the Yazoo/Mississippi Delta paralleling the Mississippi River on the West and the Yazoo on the East, (with which it confluences with 10 miles above Vicksburg). A small but dynamic river, once forested, now mostly bordered by fields, the Sunflower is a rich habitat for all creatures native to the region, including black bear and panther. Its muddy current averages 2100 cfs (cubic feet per second) at Sunflower, 3461 at the mouth of Bogue Phalia, and approximately 4500 where it empties into the Yazoo River at Steele Bayou. Its drainage includes most or all of Coahoma, Bolivar, Sunflower, Washington, Sharkey & Issaquena Counties, some 3,689 square miles, inhabited by 169,150 people.

**Cultural/Historical Mélange:** In its journey through the Delta, the Sunflower winds through the layers of mud and history that gave the world its first great blues singer (Charlie Patton, Dockery Plantation), the first mechanized cotton picker (Hopson Plantation), its oldest African-American founded community (Mound Bayou), rural Civil Rights era leaders (Fanny Lou Hamer, Sunflower County; Aaron Henry, Clarksdale), the Teddy Bear (Delta National Forest), King of the Chicago Blues (Muddy Waters, born in Rolling Fork, lived 25 years at Stovall) and the renowned ambassador of the blues (B.B. King, Indianola). The Rev. C.L. Franklin (Aretha's Father) is just one of many who were baptized in her muddy waters. Bessie Smith died at the G.T. Thomas Hospital which sits on her banks in Clarksdale (now the Riverside Hotel). Today you can hear live blues along the river at juke joints Red's and Sarah's Kitchen. Legendary woodsman, Holt Collier (1846-1936), who cornered the Teddy Bear, reported its waters to run clear & clean, and Roosevelt started each day of the hunt with a cold-water swim. One of our long-term objectives is to make the waters safe once again for fishing and swimming.

**Friends of the Sunflower River**

**291 Sunflower Avenue**

Clarksdale, MS 38614

The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch

*is brought to you courtesy of*

The Lower Mississippi River Foundation

[www.rivergator.org](http://www.rivergator.org)

[www.wildmiles.org](http://www.wildmiles.org)