
Stop 56. Great River

Arrival datetime: Sunday, July 21, 6:00PM
Sites visited: Great River Bluffs State Park
Accommodations: The Americinn
States traveled: Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota

We had miscalculated some expected mileage and found a much longer hop between our current location and our next reservation than we planned. We were in St. Joseph, Missouri and had to be in Copper Harbor, Michigan in two days. Using our TripMaker software, we chose a direct highway route and set off, leaving the flat farmlands of Missouri for the rolling hills of Idaho. We crossed the entire state of Idaho on one highway, picking up the next in Minnesota.

It was so hot that we saw cows swimming in a pond along I90. We thought it would be nice to somehow experience the Mississippi River up north as we had in New Orleans in the south. At a Minnesota Travel Information Center, we picked up a listing of state parks. Sure enough, we found a state park on the water. Actually, it overlooked the water. A half hour stroll took us up onto a bluff overlooking the Mississippi on one side and a prairie on the other. "Interpretive Exhibit" signs told us we were on the edge of the hardwood forests that stretched from our current location all the way to the east coast. To the west began the prairie. We walked through a forest of oak, pine, and walnut. The trees with white bark were no longer aspen but birch. The foliage between the trees was green and thick.

Where there was sun, there were Black-eyed Susans and Queen Anne's Lace.

Coming out of the forest to the top of the bluff, a rectangular metal sign asked, "What's the Password?" Below, it answered its own question, "Breathtaking." Michael read the sign to Jennifer and she thought he was just being silly. But there it was, miles of the dark brown and black Mississippi River swirling around green islands and peninsulas to our right, and a valley of flat green farmland to our left. We were amused that neither the Grand Canyon nor Yosemite boasted a sign that whispered, "Breathtaking," while the Mississippi River as seen from Minnesota rated one.

We got a river view room at the local Americinn. It overlooked a railroad track between the town and the river, as well as bridge to Wisconsin. We took a cooling and relaxing swim in the indoor pool, then struggled around town to find a decent restaurant that was open on Sunday. We ended up at Jefferson's, which had a bar atmosphere though it had good food. It was also on the water but had no river view. On the televisions, we read in scrolling print that the National Weather Service had the area under a Thunderstorm Watch and



"Breathtaking" view of the Mississippi River and Queen's Bluff from King's Bluff.



Storm approaching the Mississippi River as we left for dinner.

Heat Advisory. As we left the restaurant, it started to pour.

We watched the thunder and lightning first from our hotel room balcony, then from the room when the rain became too strong to stay outside. From the streetlight in the parking lot, we could see that it rained at a 45° angle. Lightning illuminated the clouds every few minutes, and several times a jagged

streak of brilliant sun yellow crossed the gloomy dark sky. Though it mostly landed vertically in the grove of trees across the river, several times it created a jagged line like mountain peaks on the horizon. We fell asleep watching the storm.

Miles traveled: 469
Departure datetime: Monday, July 22, 8:40AM
Departure weather: 74° Partly Cloudy