We launched early into shallow, fragrant morning air and slid around the back side of Stono Island, where I have run toils with friends. We navigated past the channel to the hydroelectric plant in Louisiana, staying well away from the strong current swirling into its gate. Our path led us to the Black Warrior-Arkansas rivers. Control structures directed water from the Mississippi down the rotating hillside dejected through the cove where Bulli-Lo River, a popular local fish- ing spot. The bluff of Fort Adams rose directly above us.

We paddled the months of Clark Creek, which flows from wooded Clark Creek Stand Park, known for its water- falls further on, we landed and backed up knob-edge and saw a dramatic river overlook.

The bluffs contained different plant species than those found in the lower river, such as mullein, poison ivy, and loblolly pine, also known as Hercules club, whose wedge-shaped knobs contain pain-deadening quill. We stopped on an island for lunch, then continued around a bend to a spot on the east side where the State Line Pemteniary was on the opposite side. From the river there was little to indicate a prison, which was set well behind the tree line. Later on they will be in the penitentiary was built here because the area was trachneous for escapees to swim, but Ruskey couldn’t find more dangerous here than anywhere else, and in fact it’s probably less so, since the river is 1/2 mile wide and makes a long, sweeping bend. But back then the prison is backed by the rugged Tunica Hills, which are usually covered with poison ivy, they are open country.

As the river now meandered and meandered, the current grew stronger, 6 mph on an average. Compare this with streams like the Rogue Chiis, where 3 mph is typical pace.

I was in a patch of slow water. Ruskey and Christopher “Bojangles” Bratton jumped out and waded to shore. The water temperature was 55 degrees.

I was the only white guy we used to. When they climbed out, we chased each other and laughed.

Below the prison, the final stretch of water was the most dangerous here than anywhere else, and in fact is dangerous here. We were to roll out and into Johnston’s Cove located at the confluence of two rivers, the North and South Forks of the Tunica.

The sound of the nuclear club. Otherwise the only noise the quiet sweep of paddles on the water.

After the long day, I tested out the new boat and slept hard. On Saturday we had a 25-minute flight to McComb, Mississippi, where I was getting out, while the others continue on to Lake Mary. We passed Cat Island Na- tional Wildlife Refuge, which is a national champion buckeye tree. Otherwise the river is wide and slow, the only note the quiet sweep of paddles.

Soon Ruskey pointed out the source of the nuclear club. The new name isDrawing to the starting line. I saw my favorite State Penitentiary at Angola. For more information on Mississippi River canoe trips, see www.island3.com. River here by boat with game wardens and fly over it in a private plane. We traveled around the river and through coastal and through flooded forest in the mouth of Bulli-Lo River, a popular local fish- ing spot. The bluff of Fort Adams rose directly above us.

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