

Lower Mississippi River Dispatch No. 302

Tuesday, Aug 25, 2015

This weekend on the River!



Mississippi River Nature Weekend

August 28-29-30th

Tara Wildlife

(near Eagle Lake, Vicksburg, Mississippi)

Always wanted to canoe the Mississippi River to a pristine beach island? Tara Wildlife is offering short round trips to Willow Island all day Saturday, August 29th! Guided and Outfitted by the Mighty Quapaws of Natchez and Vicksburg. No previous experience necessary. Keep reading below for more details.

Race For Rivers

Aug 29, 2015

St. Charles Missouri

The Mighty Quapaws will be helping out with guided round-trips in their lovely hand-crafted voyageur canoes for the Annual Race For Rivers, Aug 29, 2015, in St. Charles Missouri. Go to Race for the Rivers website for more information.

Canoe Trip at the Mississippi River Nature Weekend – August 28-30th

At this year's [Mississippi River Nature Weekend](#), you can see the beauty of the Mississippi River on a 2-3 hour canoe excursion with Quapaw Canoe Company.

John Ruskey of Quapaw Canoe Company has been canoeing the lower Mississippi River for nearly 30 years. "It's the most beautiful, wild, energizing, and refreshing place I've ever been," says Ruskey.

John recommends the early morning canoe trip as the best time to see wildlife along the Mississippi River. From deer to coyote, wading birds, songbirds and even river otters, you won't be disappointed with nature's display.

You'll be driven from Tara's main lodge to Tara Landing along the river where the canoes will be loaded. The canoes will travel along the shoreline of the river, which is bordered by layers of forest, fields, and the remnants of older channels, and then cross over the main river channel to reach Willow Island. After a short walk on the sands of Willow Island, you'll paddle back to Tara Landing.



Reading the Tracks in the Sand

Willow Island is a large sandbar island that has an abundance of wildlife. The sand often has animal tracks from the forest to the water's edge. "The sand tells a story," Ruskey says. "We can look at the footprints and learn the story of the animals that were here the night before."

Ruskey ‘reads’ the prints and interprets the activity of the animals that were on the beach. Some tracks may show evidence of being chased by a predator, some may line up to drink the water, and once, Ruskey saw the tracks of an alligator. There will be an abundance of bird tracks in the sand; the patterns that they make are fascinating to look at.



Canoeing on the Mississippi River

What to Bring

Ruskey recommends that you wear clothing that is appropriate for the day’s weather: rain jacket (if needed), shoes that you don’t mind getting muddy or wet, and appropriate clothing. Be sure to apply a good quality sunscreen (spray sunscreen is not recommended). Life jackets in all sizes are available from Quapaw.

If you’d like to get a better look at the wildlife along the way, bring a pair of binoculars, your camera, or your phone (for photographs). John recommends you bring a large Ziploc bag to put your electronic equipment in if it rains.

No Experience Required

If you’ve never canoed before or if you are a canoe expert, all ages and skill levels are welcome on this excursion. The Quapaw Canoe Company captains will provide instruction and each boat will have an experienced captain (who steers) and first mate (at the bow, who sets the stroke).

The advice from John Ruskey on canoe safety is simple: “Balance and listen to your captain.” He advises that you make yourself comfortable in the canoe and find a good paddling position.

Each participant will be required to sign a waiver. Children 18 and under must have a parent or guardian available to sign the waiver on their behalf.

Space is limited. Each canoe seats about 10 people and there are two canoes per excursion. To ensure

a spot on the canoes, register now by calling 601-279-4261 or [register online](#).

The Quapaw Canoe Company



Canoeing to Willow Island

In business since 1988, the company is dedicated to human-empowered adventures on the lower Mississippi River. They hand-build their own canoes out of cypress. The company's mission is to share the beauty of the lower Mississippi River.

Owner John Ruskey is committed to giving back to the community. He has worked with a variety of conservation groups to help protect and preserve the river and its surroundings. He has worked to map the lower Mississippi River and created a 1100-mile water trail from St. Louis through the Gulf of Mexico. The [paddler's guide and map](#) is available online.

He also established a youth leadership program, the [Might Quapaw Apprenticeship Program](#). Through the apprenticeship program, which is run through the Lower Mississippi River Foundation, Ruskey teaches local youth about leadership and life skills through survival training on the Mississippi River. The youth that participate in the program learn the how to turn wood into a canoe, paddle a canoe safely, build a fire, build shelter, and cook on a campfire.

To learn more about the Quapaw Canoe Company, visit their website at <http://www.island63.com>

Mississippi River Nature Weekend

Other activities during the weekend include:

- mountain biking
- kids' kite flying contest
- live music by the Cee Blaque Combo
- open-air bus birding tours
- wildlife photography seminar with Joe Mac Hudspeth
- birding tours with Bruce Reid
- wildlife management seminar with Bill Tomlinson
- self-guided nature trails
- and more!

See the [full schedule of events](#).

Contact us at 601-279-4261 to make reservations or with any questions.

Willow Island: Saturday, Aug 29th

Layne Logue made a photographic journey to Willow Island last weekend from Tara Wildlife. Here's what he found:



Willow Island shimmers like a Sailboat on the Sea (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



Stands of Willow Trees swaying like Palm Trees in the Breeze (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



A large Blue Hole in the Middle of the Island (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



Do Feathers make Tracks? Answer: Yes! (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



Do Leaves make Tracks? Answer: Yes! (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



More Willows, also Cottonwoods (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



A Beaver Family constructed a "Highwater Lodge" out of their favorite building material -- and food -- Willow branches! (Willow Island, Aug 2015)



The water is seeping back into the River making canyons in the sand. (Willow Island, Aug 2015)

Willow Island is awaiting your toes to discover, this weekend at Tara Wildlife! Only one hour from Jackson, Mississippi. Half hour from Vicksburg.

Go to <http://www.tarawildlife.com/mississippi-river-canoe-trip-to-willow-island/> for full details and more information.

The Lower Mississippi River Dispatch
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The Lower Mississippi River Foundation

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