

# Solo river sojourner passes through

Man is canoeing the  
Mississippi from source  
to mouth.

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The wind in his face and his goal ahead, Ron Haines has come 900 miles in a silver canoe saddled with green waterproof bags containing a tent, some maps and other necessities. A little less than halfway through a 2,500-mile journey from the headwaters of the Mississippi River in Minnesota to its mouth in New Orleans, he stopped in Burlington Saturday night for some shut-eye and to learn about the area.

Haines, a former photo editor for the Florida-based Star tabloid newspaper, said his decision to travel the length of America's longest river was based on a sense of adventure, a desire to learn and craving for excitement.

"I like going places in my canoe," he said. "I'm very comfortable in my canoe."

Traveling by himself and occasionally staying with people associated with national environmental conservation group the Sierra Club, Haines has been on the river for 50 days now, usually camping near boat landings or on islands when he gets tired.

"When I started this trip, I thought it would take about three months, now I think it'll be closer to four," he said.

This weekend, Haines, 59, en-  
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BURLINGTON, IOWA

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### River

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joyed a bed, which he said he has done only "eight or ten times" since the start of the trip. Cindy Gaffney, an active member of the Burlington chapter of the Sierra Club, provided the lodging. She also provided information about environmental issues surrounding the upper Mississippi River and the Burlington area.

Far from being a pleasure trip, Haines hopes to write a book about the experience, featuring vignettes, pictures and tales from residents on the river.

After informing Haines of a contentious plan to build a lake in northwest Des Moines County, Gaffney apologized, saying she could "go on and on" about the subject, but Haines, eager to listen, egged her on.

"No, no," he said. "That's why I stay with people like Cindy: to learn about the area."

Growing up in Davenport, Haines said traveling the Mississippi's length was always something he wanted to do. After graduating from the University of Illinois with a degree in journalism,

he settled down, got a job at the Quad Cities Times in Davenport and married his wife, Sue. The change from care-free college student to full-time employee and husband effectively stopped his plans for a four-month canoe trip.

Now, after taking a severance package from the Star, Haines is free to explore the middle part of the country.

"I've been thinking about this seriously for about three or four years," he said, wearing a faded green stocking hat and a red Eddie Bauer jacket. "If I'm going to do this, now's the time to do it. I'm not getting any younger."

This is not his first trip away from home, either. After college, Haines joined the Peace Corps, where he spent three years in Ethiopia. Following that, he traveled from India to Europe over land. He has also spent time in northern Africa and in eastern Europe.

The canoe trip has been interesting in many different ways, Haines said. Near Lake Itasca, the starting point on the trip, some parts of the river are not navigable, even for a small canoe. On other parts of the river, dams required Haines to travel around them to continue on, he said.

"The beginning was especially tough because of the low water level," Haines said. He pointed out that with a low water level, there is little current in the river to guide a canoe.

Haines travels about 20 miles per day before stopping. He headed out again Sunday morning, his boat pointed toward Fort Madison.

"It's something I'm going to do," Haines said of his trip. "It'll be a real thrill when I paddle into New Orleans."

## Put it in The Guide

The deadline to submit items for The Guide is noon Thursday for Sunday's newspaper. Announcements may be mailed to:

**The Guide**  
c/o The Hawk Eye  
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