

"The Wisconsin River is very broad with a sandy bottom forming many shallows which render navigation difficult. It is full of vine clad islands. On the banks appear



fertile lands diversified by woods, prairies and hills. We saw oak, walnut, basswood and another kind of tree armed with long thorns."

**Father Jacques Marquette
(June - 1673)**

"On the 8th of October, we put our canoes into the Wisconsin River which flows with a strong but smooth current. The water is very clear and through it you can see a fine and



sandy bottom free of rocks. In the river are a few islands which are quite wooded. The land near the river seems to be excellent but, at a distance, is full of mountains said to abound in lead."

**Jonathan Carver
(October - 1766)**

"The Wisconsin River is a wide and shallow stream running over a bed of sand with transparent waters and chequered with numerous small islands and sand bars. It has an alluvial valley bounded by calcareous hills which frequently present naked precipices toward the river. The predominating trees are oak, elm and maple.



The navigation of the river is considerably impeded by the sandbars and small islands and some time is lost in searching for the proper channel. The river bluffs continue, sometimes receding a mile or two from the river and giving place bottomlands and patches of prairie, then shutting in close upon the water's edge."

**Henry Schoolcraft
(August - 1820)**

"The Wisconsin River valley is a wide, gloomy, mountain-girt valley, with great sandbars and thickly-wooded morasses. Settlement is slight. The few villages are generally a mile to three miles back, at the foot of the bluffs, out of the way of the flood, and the river appears to be but little used. None but a hermit could enjoy those long stretches of waterway where one may



float for a day without seeing man or animal on the forest bound shores and where the oppression of solitude is felt with such force that it takes but slight stretch of the imagination to carry one's self back in thought and feeling to the times when the black robed members of the Company of Jesus first penetrated the gloomy wilderness."

**Reuben Gold Thwaites
(August - 1877)**

"Spotted sandpipers haunt the shallows, the herons drowse where once the curlews flew, crying wildly, where parquets once made tropic color in the river bottoms, where the sky was darkened by the clouds of passenger pigeons in migration. Opossums, raccoons, the foxes and minks and otters still inhabit the Wisconsin's shores; the barred owls make their cacophony of cries suddenly in the twilight and the dark; but the bears are gone, the buffalo that once roamed its shores, the timber wolves-all are gone; and the lynx going, thinning before the white man's coming. In the lowland places along the blue waters, the golden prothonotary warbler nests in the spring, the pileated woodpecker challenges man with his proud, fierce cry, hawks wheel and soar upon the air currents, magnificent as ever. There are



aspects of wilderness still, at its headwaters as well as near its mouth: in the wooded islands, the hill slopes, the forest country- and a kind of nostalgic wildness in its name: Wisconsin. Its waters, rising in a country of evergreens, birch, aspen, oak and ash, flow into the Father of Waters among honey locusts, chinquapin oak, black male, and sycamores: once these were forests, reaching skyward, and they are only now beginning to come back- something starting over, something coming again, as if time were turning back to say that the prairie grass, the oak groves, the wilderness will return, not revenants of past time, but reality once more, to erase the marks remembered now, the way the Indians went, and the trappers and the miners, the raftsmen and lumberjacks, the pioneers..."

August Derleth
THE WISCONSIN: River
of A Thousand Isles
(1942)

"Yet there remains the river, in a few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan's day; at early dawn...one can still hear it singing in the wilderness..."



Perhaps our grandsons, having never seen a river, will never miss the chance to set a canoe in singing waters."

Aldo Leopold
(1947)