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A mobile app for the Mighty Mo

## Phone app makes Missouri River info more accessible

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Tim Cowman, coordinator of the Missouri National Recreational River Water Trail, shows off a mobile app that details 26 sites on or near the river from Fort Randall Dam near Pickstown, South Dakota, to Sioux City. The app is capable of pulling up information about the sites while people in kayaks and canoes float past.

Justin Wan, Sioux City Journal

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VERMILLION, S.D. | For a number of years, Missouri River enthusiasts have developed websites full of information touting the scenery, history and notable sites along the river in this area.

Tim Cowman and members of the Missouri National Recreational River Water Trail committee wanted to make all those interesting facts and photos even more accessible, especially to those paddling down the river in canoes and kayaks.

What better way to make that information available to an audience on the move by creating a mobile app in which those floating on the river can learn about the interesting features they're seeing by making a few swipes on their smartphones?

"The app is something that was developed as a way to promote and support the Missouri River Water Trail," said Cowman, coordinator of the Missouri National Recreational River Water Trail and a geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey housed at the University of South Dakota.

Stretching some 100 miles from Fort Randall Dam near Pickstown, South Dakota, to Sioux City, the trail, established in 2013 by the National Park Service, includes many historic, scenic and interesting sites. Cowman said he wanted to see information about them put into the hands of more people.

Knowing that many people use a smartphone to plan trips, it was logical to develop an app they could use to explore the Missouri River. Plus, Cowman had seen apps for hiking trails in other national parks and thought it would be something that could be adapted for a water trail.

The goal: teach more people about the river and attract more visitors.

"There's a lot of historically and naturally interesting things on the river that they might not be aware of," Cowman said.

Work on the app started in 2014, and it was released last summer. Cowman said he knew from personal experience that it's hard to get a cellphone signal in many spots on the river, so the app was built so that when installed on a mobile device, all the data -- sound, photos, text -- is stored onto the device so it can be accessed without a signal.

The app, which can be found at [www.i-treks.com/routes/4/](http://www.i-treks.com/routes/4/), includes information on 26 features, not only those that can be seen from the river, but also points of interest, such as Spirit Mound and scenic overlooks, that are accessed by land.

"You can use it to learn about the Missouri River even if you're not on the Missouri River," Cowman said.

On the river, the app uses GPS on the user's phone to detect the nearest river features. It will pull up videos and other information about that feature that can be viewed while the user is floating past.

"Now you're there actually seeing it, you're not in your house looking at pictures of it," Cowman said. "Most people tell us they find it helpful and educational."

River guides demonstrate the app during interpretive paddles -- guided kayak/canoe tours on the river -- each summer. During the free events, guides lead 12-15 people onto the river and take them to two or three points of interest. The guides bring electronic devices along so that during each stop, they can show participants how the app works. Many people will download the app once the tour is finished.

The app shows a lot of potential, Cowman said. More points of interest are planned to be added to the app so that it will highlight some river feature every couple of miles. Cowman said he doesn't know how many people have downloaded the app, but he's seen a lot more people kayaking and canoeing on the river in the past five years.

There's seemingly more interest in the Missouri River, and Cowman said the app is another way to help people become more familiar with it.

"I think more people are becoming aware of what this river has to offer, not only for recreation but also in terms of how significant it is from an ecological standpoint and how significant it is from a cultural and history standpoint," Cowman said. "We're trying to make people more aware of just what the river has to offer, how unique it is, how important it is to our area."