Discovery of the North Alabama
Local farmers may have found steamboat from late 1800s

By Jesse Clesy

OBERT, Neb. — In an area where horse-drawn covered wagons grace Highway signs, one more glimpse into days past could be seen peeking out from the cloudy brown waters of the Missouri River on Saturday.

Mostly submerged in the river on the north side of Goat Island, or about 8 miles north of Obert, a Nebraska village populated by 47 souls, one could see what remained of what scholars believe was once a wooden steamboat from the late 1800s.

“I had no idea what it was when I first came up on it. I thought maybe it was a old bridge or something,” Clint Pinkelman, a 25-year-old hog farmer from Hartington, Neb., said. “I started to look at it a little better and realized it was an old boat.”

Pinkelman, who was recreational boating on the river, immediately called his father, Rick, and told him about the discovery. Word started to spread among Pinkelman’s circle of family and friends, and numerous rides to the site and Internet research followed.

This particular corps of discovery came up with a guess that the approximately 170-foot-long deteriorating vessel belonged to the North Alabama, a 220-ton vessel that sank on Oct. 27, 1870. Pinkelman decided it was time to call in some big guns.

On Saturday morning, Pinkelman and his father met three steamboat wreck experts at a recreation area north of Obert, South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources geologist Dennis Iles, DENR administrator Tim Cowman and University of South Dakota professor of anthropology Larry Bradley, along with...
Wreck Location

Goat Island
Goat Island - 2004

Nebraska

South Dakota
Unidentified steamboat?
The North Alabama

Type: Sternwheel, wooden hull packet.
Length and beam: 160x32 feet
Destroyed: October 27, 1870

On October 30, 1870, the Daily Journal (Sioux City) reported:

“Sinking of the Steamer North Alabama

Since our yesterday’s issue we have learned some additional particulars of the sinking of the steamer North Alabama, on Thursday evening last at 8 o’clock, two miles above Wiseman’s wood yard and about twenty miles below Yankton. She was making a crossing, that is she was going from the Dakota shore to the Nebraska shore, and about 200 yards from the latter shore she struck her bow on the end of a sunken log, and went down without advancing another yard, the log knocking a hole in her nearly eight feet long and two feet wide, sinking her in less than 30 minutes…. She was the property of the Northwest Transportation Company, and was valued at $12,000. There was no insurance on her.”
Sunken log (snag)

Measured dimensions:
159 ft long
34 ft wide
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GPS Location of Steamboat Wreck on 1881 map
7 months later

October 11, 2004
Change from March 13 to October 24, 2004

March 13

October 24
Views toward the bow and stern
November 16, 2004
November 16, 2004
Fire brick and cast iron engine parts
November 16, 2004
Turnbuckles
November 16, 2004
Middle-Starboard Rudder
November 16, 2004
Middle-Port Rudder
March 13 and November 16, 2004
Sunken log (snag)

The North Alabama
- Sunk Oct 30, 1870 -