Welcome to
Sunshine Bottom
Wildlife Management Area

Lat: 42° 55' 17.4" N
Long: 98° 24' 27.05" W

The Sunshine Bottom river access is nestled within a picturesque river valley. Limited development and low use levels create an environment of solitude within one of the most scenic reaches of the Water Trail.

Ahead, the river valley begins to widen slightly with a noticeable increase in backwaters, islands and sandbars. Channel complexity increases within the delta formed as the Niobrara River enters the Missouri, some 22 miles downstream.

The delta extends into Lewis & Clark Lake, and its effects can be seen as far upstream as Verdel, the next access point on this Water Trail.

Old Baldy is about a half-mile off the river on the south side, and rises 70 feet above the surrounding bluffs. The hill is accessible only by land.

Encountered by Lewis & Clark on September 7th, 1804, Old Baldy lies some four miles upstream from Sunshine Bottom.

Niobrara chalk bluffs

The Niobrara Formation is exposed in the bluffs along the river. This rock unit was formed approximately 85 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period while a shallow inland sea covered this area.

Fossils, including coccoliths and foraminifera shells, make up most of the Niobrara Formation. It is also rich in fossil remains of fishes, marine reptiles, flying reptiles, and toothed birds.

There they discovered a colony of 'barking squirrels' or prairie dogs, a species previously unknown to scientists.

Just downstream from Sunshine Bottom the river valley begins to widen slightly with increased sandbars and islands.

Side channels and wetlands provide additional fish and wildlife habitat and add ecosystem complexity.

Sanctuary Island, located about eight miles downstream from Sunshine Bottom, is the largest island on this segment of the MNRR.

Eagle nest in cottonwood

This reach of river is wonderful habitat for bald eagles,

Several pair nest in the mature cottonwood trees, and the clear open waters below Ft. Randall Dam are ideal for catching prey.

Lewis & Clark councilled with Ihanktonwan or Yankton Sioux leaders downstream at Calumet Bluff in August, 1804.

Padaniapapi, or Struck by the Ree, was an infant during the summit. According to legend, Lewis called for the child and wrapped him in an American flag.

In 1858, Padaniapapi and other chiefs signed a treaty between the Ihanktonwan and the United States which opened 11 million acres of what is now southeast South Dakota to non-Indian settlement. The Yankton Sioux were relocated to the lands they had reserved for themselves north of the Missouri River in current Charles Mix County.

The Treaty Monument stands near Greenwood, SD, the former location of the Yankton-Siouxs Tribal Headquarters. The Water Trail follows the southern border of this historic reservation from above Fort Randall Dam to Choteau Creek.

Note: Emergency access points are limited on both sides of the Missouri in this reach. Please plan accordingly.

This sign was funded by a grant from the National Park Service

Please see the other side of this sign for information about the Missouri National Recreational River. Enjoy yourself and be safe!