

# VIDEO SCRIPT

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**TITLE: The Mighty Mo'**

**SERIES: Dakota Pathways: A History**

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**PRODUCER: Jim Sprecher**

**DRAFT: FINAL RECORDED VERSION**

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**V I S U A L**

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1. 1. OPEN MONTAGE (:20) Kids at Cultural Center with guide

NAT SOUND UP AND UNDER  
MUSIC UP

MUSIC UNDER

2. MONTAGE Modern recreational activity on the Missouri: Canoeing, powerboat, water skier, fishing, sailing at sunset.

NARRATOR:

South Dakota has a road running through it, a road made of water, called the Missouri.

3. WS Missouri River, half-dissolve in map of state showing river.

This great river cuts the state in half and has served as a kind of road for centuries. Its traffic has been central to South Dakota history.

Re-enactment: Keelboat travel on natural stretch of Missouri.

4. Bodmer painting

American Indians built the first riverboats here, stretching bison hides over willow-wood frames.

5. Bison hide boat, on riverbank.

6. POP-UP FACT: They were called bullboats because the hides were often from bull Bison."

7. GLOBE: Showing long distance between the river and Europe.

In the early 1800s, these people had no way of guessing that high fashion halfway around the globe would shortly create a Missouri River rush.

8. Sketches: Felt hats as worn in high society circa 1800's

Fine felt hats became the thing for men in Europe to wear.

9. Beaver pelt on stretcher.

The best materials for felt hats were beaver skins, called pelts.

10. Bodmer painting of "Boston Lighthouse".

Europeans, and Americans living on the east coast, didn't know much about rivers far to the west, but they did know one thing. Lots of beavers lived there.

11 Beaver swimming and slapping its tail.

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- 12. Re-enactment: Trappers on river in pirogue's and keelboats.
- 13. Re-enactment: Keelboat under oar power.
- 14. Re-enactment: Keelboat under sail.
- 15. CU: Snags and Boilers.
- 16. Man watching with telescope then we see lightning.
- 16. River shots

**NARRATOR:**

American, French, and British fur traders swarmed up and down the Missouri, hoping to make big money supplying the fashion industry.

These trappers and traders often traveled in long, wooden crafts called keelboats, powered by paddles, and sometimes by sails. The river was always dangerous. To survive, keelboaters had to understand its powerful motion. They had to watch for tree branches boaters called snags or sawyers, and surging waters they called boilers. Keelboaters spoke of reading the river, studying the waters for danger. They read the sky, too, looking for killer lightning or deadly winds. Old-time river travelers sometimes called the Missouri the Mighty Mo, because of its power, or Old Misery, because it could be cruel.

**Indian Music Up and Under**

- 17. Re-enactment: Indians on river bank watching. CU's camp life...trade goods. Indians on keelboat with trappers.
- 18. Trapper scrapping hide.
- 19. Indians walking along bank of river.

The keelboaters had to understand something else to survive: American Indian people—the Yanktons, Tetons, Mandans, and Arikaras—watched Missouri River traffic closely. These people usually helped outsiders traveling the river—especially if travelers traded useful goods like sugar, tobacco, coffee, cooking pots, and clothing. Some fur trappers became close friends with native people, and even married into their families.

20. POP-UP FACT: "French names remain common among American Indians even today."

**SUPER:** French names:  
Archambeux, Amiotte, Lebeu,  
Laplante.

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21. PAINTINGS: Lewis and Clark
22. Re-enactment: Lewis and Clark expedition.
23. Picture of President Jefferson.
26. MAP: Showing Louisiana showing purchased lands.
27. WS Western mountain country.
29. Re-enactment: Lewis and Clark expedition to Spirit Mound.
- Man writing in journal, prairie dogs, antelope, bison, bear, elk, mule deer.
30. MAP: Showing route to west coast and back.
31. Re-enactments: L&C and Indians around campfire.
32. Curtis photographs showing Yantons, Tetons, Mandans and Arikaras.
33. Curtis photos showing village dissolving away.

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North American tribes along the Missouri also helped the most famous Missouri River boaters of all time, Lewis and Clark. In 1804, the pair led an expedition of fifty explorers up the river from St. Louis, Missouri, on a mission ordered by the President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson.

The United States was a country 28 years old then. The previous year it had bought land from France so that the young nation extended from the Atlantic Ocean nearly to the Pacific.

These western lands were a mystery to Europeans and Americans. So Merriwether Lewis and William Clark jumped into a two-year adventure of discovery.

About three months into their journey, Lewis and Clark reached what is now South Dakota. They were impressed by the native people and amazed by the wildlife they found. They kept written journals that described barking squirrels—we call them prairie dogs—and fast running goats we know as pronghorns or antelopes. Lewis and Clark also saw bison, bears, elk and mule deer. The mule deer were bigger than the deer they knew in the eastern United States.

The explorers made it all the way to the Pacific, and then returned to St. Louis in 1806. People read parts of their journals and wanted to go west, too. The journals gave credit to native people for helping Lewis and Clark.

Indian Music Up and Under

But the explorers, and their American Indian friends, had no way of knowing how tragic interest in the region would be for the Yanktons, Tetons, Mandans, and Arikaras.

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34. POP-UP FACT: "The worst disease native people faced was smallpox."

35. Bison herds.

36. Badlands shot.

37. Painting of artist painting indians.

38. Painting of John James Audubon and his bird images.

39. Pierre Chateau portrait

40. Painting of the steamboat "Yellowstone."

41. B/W sketch of Fort Pierre

42. MAP: showing Fort Pierre and Pierre.

43. Photos: Paddlewheelers, Alabama, L.D. Walde

44. MAP: Showing Fort Pierre, Pierre, Vermillion, Yankton.

45. Photos: Vermillion 1881 Flood.

46. Photos: Rebuilt towns

47. Photos: wrecked riverboats.

48. Ice flows on Missouri River.

Outsiders traveling the river unknowingly brought new and terrible diseases. Some American Indian villages were completely wiped out by sickness.

Trappers soon turned their attention from beaver pelts to bison hides and tongue. Scientists also rode west from the river to the Badlands and collected petrified bones of prehistoric animals. And artists, like painters George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, helped the world understand American Indian life.

Another artist who journeyed up the river, John Audubon, painted mostly wildlife.

The river also brought Pierre Chouteau. He traveled up the Missouri in 1832 on a big steam-powered boat called the Yellowstone, and he built a trading post and fort for the American Fur Company. Today we pronounce his first name—Pierre—differently than he did. But Fort Pierre on the west side of the river, and our state capital of Pierre on the east side, are named for Chouteau.

Steamboats like the Yellowstone were also called paddlewheelers, because of the churning wheels that moved the boats. The power came from steam created in red-hot tanks or boilers.

The boats had tremendous power, and moved thousands of people into the region.

River towns like Fort Pierre, Pierre, Vermillion, Yankton, and many smaller places sprang up. Springtime floods threatened the towns. In March, 1881, a torrent washed away hundreds of buildings. The town of Vermillion was almost entirely destroyed, and many big boats sank. The disaster signaled the end of the Missouri being the area's main road. Towns were rebuilt, but some companies didn't have enough money to replace their boats. By the 1880s a new technology had arrived on the scene...

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49. Moving steam locomotive.
  50. River shot
  51. Web Pointer
  52. River shot
  53. Photo of Railroad bridges  
Mobridge and Pierre.
  54. Photo 1912 era car.
  55. Photo: Car ferry
  56. Missouri River ice..
  57. Norbeck portrait.
  58. MAP: showing where the five  
bridges were.
  59. Photo: John Kirkham,
  60. Photo: Bridge construction.
  61. Mobridge SD bridge.
  62. Photo: William McMaster.
  63. Boiling water of Missouri.
  64. Photo: Kirkham bridge over  
Missouri river.
  65. Trucking shot over Missouri  
river bridge at Oahe. Oahe  
Lake shot.

Trains.

For railroads, the Missouri River was a big headache. Some people in the 1880s said no one could make railroad bridges across the Mighty Mo that would survive floods. But bridge-building crews went to work to prove those people wrong, and they spanned the river with two train bridges, at Mobridge and Pierre, in 1907.

Cars were becoming popular by then, so South Dakotans asked, why not bridges for drivers? In the early years people got their automobiles from one side of the river to the other by ferryboats. Or they drove across on ice in winter. Sometimes the ice wasn't as solid as it looked, and cars broke through.

So in 1919, Governor Peter Norbeck got the state legislature to put up more than two million dollars to build five Missouri River bridges. In charge of construction was John Kirkham, a man from Indiana who came west to be a lawman, and who looked like a lawman as he led the bridge work, wearing a gunbelt and six shooters. The first of the five bridges to open was the one at Mobridge. By then William McMaster was governor. At the bridge opening, McMaster called the moment "a victory won over the treacherous river."

John Kirkham guessed his bridges would stand 500 years.

Instead, they lasted less than 40, but not because of floods.

In the 1950s and 1960s, South Dakota's piece of the Missouri changed completely. Engineers built four flood control dams to make the river less treacherous, and to use the Mighty Mo's power to create electricity.

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66. Tom Brokaw ON CAMERA  
River at Pickstown  
Stick turning up stones. WEB  
    POINTER  
Boy fishing  
CU water  
Composite of river scene and  
    Keelboat moving up river and  
    Lakota warriors crossing.  
    Grizzly bear, Elk, River at  
    sunset.
- Brokaw ON CAMERA
67. WS Lake Oahe, dam in  
    distance. WEB POINTER

Tom Brokaw:

Describing what it was like to live at Pickstown during the Fort Randall Dam's construction. He'd be in an excellent position to describe how changing geography impacted the history of this spot during his lifetime: damming the river created the town from scratch. Then Pickstown went bust after construction, and now it's growing because of fishing and hunting.

68. Shot of Oahe, and then stills of  
    President Kennedy.
69. Jamie Damon ON CAMERA
70. Photos: Dam dedication,  
    Kennedy and Jamie Damon &  
    family.

Behind each of the four dams, wide lakes formed. That meant that new, longer bridges had to be built.

In 1962, almost 160 years after President Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark to explore the river, another President came to see for himself how the river had been changed. President John F. Kennedy came to Pierre for the Oahe Dam dedication, and he did so because a Pierre schoolgirl invited him.

Jamie Damon: ON CAMERA describing how she got the President to the dedication.

71. Pulling walleye from Oahe.
72. WS Missouri river dam

NARRATOR:

The dams not only controlled water flow and delivered electricity, but created some of the finest fishing havens in the United States. The project also created controversy.

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73. Larry Mendoza ON CAMERA

LARRY MENDOZA:

Walking along river shot

Sharing his memories of the dam's development, the loss of towns and land and how compensation efforts continue fifty years later.

Natural river

Squirrel in tree, river bank, river fog, sunset on river.

74. East River aerial shot.

For South Dakotans, the Missouri is the dividing line between two halves of our state: East River, the land of farms and many towns, and West River, the place of ranches and open spaces.

75. West River aerial shot.

76. John Steinbeck

Nobel prize winning author, John Steinbeck went so far as to say the Missouri River in the Dakotas divides all America. 'One side of the river', he wrote:

77. Aerial shot East River.

VOICE OVER: "JOHN STEINBECK"

78. Aerial shot Bear Butte.

"...is the eastern landscape, eastern grass, with the look and smell of eastern America. Across the Missouri...it is pure west, with brown grass and water scorings and small outcrops. The two sides of the river might well be a thousand miles apart."

79. Sunlight on water.

80. Sailing on the river

81. Foggy river

82. Sunset on Oahe.

CLOSING MUSIC UP AND HOLD

MUSIC UNDER

83. VOCA PAGE

VOCA:

"For additional information, a teacher's guide, games, Quizzes and more, log on to [Dakotapathways.org](http://Dakotapathways.org)."

84. CLOSING CREDITS

MUSIC UP and OUT