



Finally, in 1924, crossing the Missouri River was revolutionized with the construction of the Meridian Bridge on the south edge of the city. There was a huge festival to celebrate the event, and when the bridge was paid off after 29 years of taking tolls, another celebration followed in 1953. The bridge, with its two tall towers used to draw up a section of the bridge in order for shipping to move under it, quickly became the community's most recognizable landmark, a designation it still holds today.

Crossing the Missouri River was one thing, but living along the river remained an unpredictable proposition. It could still shrink to a marsh in the driest of summers, or it could rampage across the valleys after a spring thaw.

But that changed in 1957 with the construction of Gavins Point Dam west of Yankton. It was one of six mainstem dams along the river designed to regulate its flows, provide irrigation and generate electricity. These dams, part of the Pick-Sloan Flood Control Act of 1944, tamed the river above Yankton, eliminating the threat of flooding. For those who had experienced the ravages of the river when it had run destructively wild, the dams must have seemed like a miracle.

Something else happened that wasn't necessarily miraculous but a wonderful development nonetheless. Gavins Point Dam formed Lewis and Clark Lake, the centerpiece of a recreation area that has become one of the top tourist attractions in the Midwest. In fact, it is the most popular non-Black Hills tourist destination in South Dakota. Its network of camping pads surrounding a lake/river has made the recreation area a magnet for swimmers, boaters, anglers, bicyclists and many others. Tourism has now emerged as one of the area's biggest and most durable industries; in fact, it showed solid growth

even during the recession year of 2009.

Heading downstream from Gavins Point Dam toward Sioux City, Iowa, is one of the last unchanged sections of the river. This is referred to as the Missouri National Recreational River and remains largely untouched from the days when Lewis and Clark's expedition trekked through this region.

The river was once again the focus of attention in 2008 with the completion and opening of the Discovery Bridge, located just west of the Meridian Bridge. When it became apparent that the Meridian Bridge was nearing the end of its usefulness as a traffic bridge, officials from Nebraska and South Dakota worked for years to secure funding for its replacement. The components finally fell into place, and work on the Discovery Bridge began in 2007. It was officially dedicated in October 2008 with a ceremony that attracted hundreds of people, including some who recalled the days when the Meridian Bridge was a brand-new

wonder stretching across the Missouri.

Yankton is also now home to the Easton Archery Center, built in 2008, and hosts an Olympic training facility as well as one of the nation's major archery tournaments, the First Dakota Classic. The city hosted a world tournament in 2008, and the sport figures to grow even more in the years to come.

The old Meridian Bridge still has a future. As part of the Discovery Bridge process, the bridge is being converted into a pedestrian bridge that will hook up with a new park and new trail on the Nebraska side of the river. It figures to add yet another great piece to the area's assortment of recreational offerings.

The conversion project is expected to be completed before 2011, and should give Yankton yet another reason to celebrate its 150th birthday. It also gives promise that, as rich as the past has been, a great future still awaits.

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