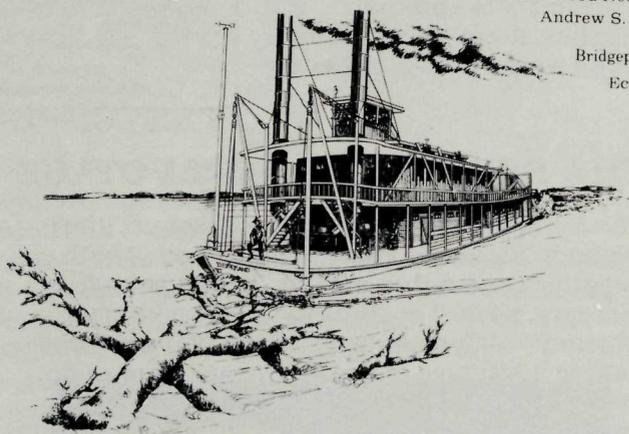
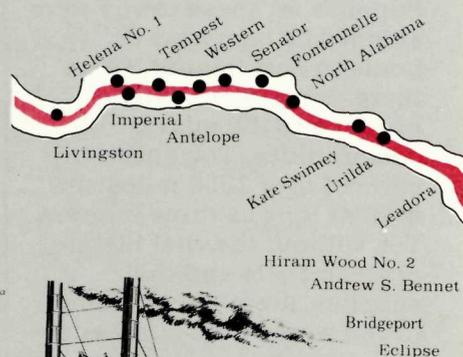




BERTRAND

BERTRAND

J. LIVINGSTON



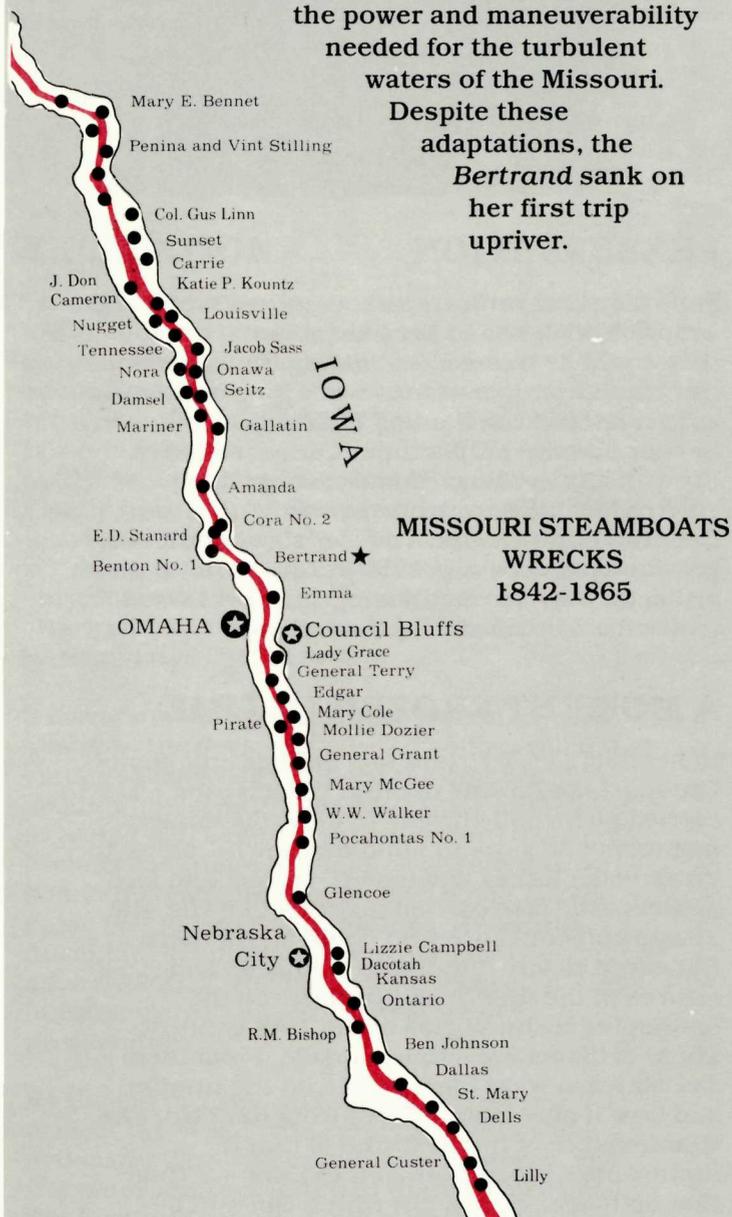
THE TREACHEROUS "BIG MUDDY"

Steamboats played a vital role in our nation's westward expansion. Vessels like the *Bertrand* provided an economical way of transporting supplies to remote posts, mining camps, and new frontier communities. But not without risk.

The Missouri River, or "the Big Muddy" as it was sometimes called, was a dangerous and unpredictable river that challenged the best of riverboat pilots. Winter ice jams, spring floods, and strong currents cut its banks and uprooted trees. The result — shifting channels, sandbars, and submerged trees, called snags. All were hazards to early navigation on the river. During the 19th century, over 400 steamers sank on the Missouri River. One of them was the *Bertrand*.

THE BERTRAND

The *Bertrand* was a mountain packet sternwheeler designed for the shallow, narrow rivers of the West. The ship was built in 1864 at Wheeling, West Virginia, and measured 178 feet in length. It is estimated that she could carry between 250 and 400 tons of cargo. The boat's flat hull allowed her to carry large loads in shallow waters, while her strong engines and sternwheel provided the power and maneuverability needed for the turbulent waters of the Missouri. Despite these adaptations, the *Bertrand* sank on her first trip upriver.



1862...MONTANA TERRITORY...GOLD!

With the discovery of gold at Alder Gulch in Montana Territory, towns like Virginia City, Deer Lodge, and Hell Gate sprang to life overnight. Supplies for these towns were shipped by boat from St. Louis to Fort Benton. From there, goods were hauled overland to the mining communities. The entire trip covered over 2000 miles and took as long as three months. Yet, without the vital lifeline of steamboats and their supplies, few of these frontier towns would have survived.

1865, 1865!
HOT FOR THE GOLD MINES!
THROUGH
BILLS LADING
GIVEN BY THE
MONTANA & IDAHO TRANSPORTATION LINE
Virginia City, Bannock City, Deer Lodge
ALL POINTS IN THE MINING DISTRICTS.



DEER LODGE, Saturday, March 4th
BERTRAND, Thursday, March 16th
BENTON, Saturday, March 17th
YELLOW STONE, Saturday, March 18th
FANNY OGDEN, Saturday, April 15th.

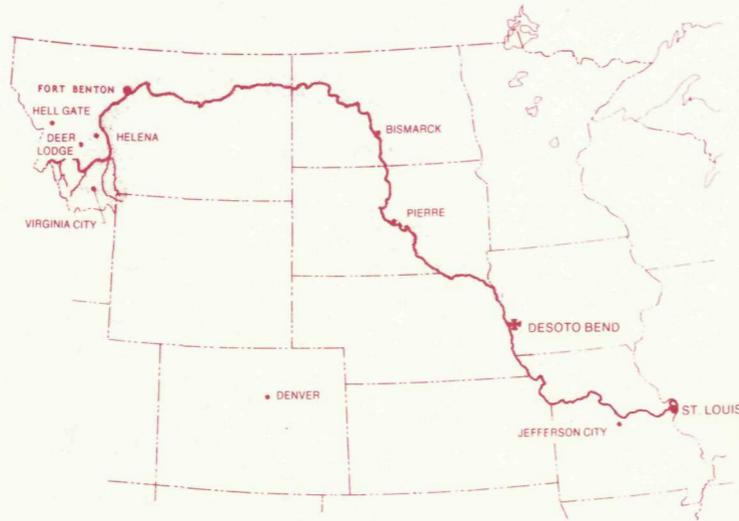
J. EAGER,
41 Broad Street, N. Y.

THE BERTRAND'S LAST VOYAGE

The *Bertrand's* journey up the Missouri River began in St. Louis. Here she was loaded with supplies rumored to include 35,000 pounds of mercury, \$4,000 in gold, and 5,000 gallons of whiskey — a fortune worth \$300,000 or more! Taking advantage of the spring melt and rains, the steamer left St. Louis on March 18, 1865, and headed for Omaha to pick up additional passengers and a new pilot, Captain Horace E. Bixby. On April 1, the *Bertrand* left Omaha and continued her voyage.

But luck was not with the steamer. Around three o'clock in the afternoon the vessel hit a snag and sank in 12 feet of water, approximately 25 miles north of Omaha. The gangplank was lowered and those on board walked ashore. Portions of the superstructure and some of the cargo on deck were removed to provide temporary shelter for the passengers and crew. Later, they returned to Omaha to resume their westward journeys.

Within weeks, insurers of the boat sent divers to salvage the vessel's engines and paddlewheel. The sinking of the *Cora II* several hundred yards upstream, however, caused salvage operations to be temporarily halted. When divers returned to the *Bertrand*, the river had claimed the steamer. Further salvage was hopeless.



DISCOVERY

Lured by the legend of gold, whiskey, and mercury, treasure hunters searched for the *Bertrand* — but to no avail. With time, the mighty Missouri had changed its course, leaving the *Bertrand* in a low-lying field under 25 to 30 feet of silt and clay. It was not until 1967 that salvors closed in again on the wreck.



Armed with old maps, historic records, and a federal contract allowing them to retain 60 percent of the value of the treasure, salvors Sam Corbino and Jesse Pursell began an intensive search. Their hunt narrowed to a former river channel 700 feet east of DeSoto Lake. With the use of a sophisticated "metal detector," called a magnetometer, they identified a large concentration of buried metal. On February 28, 1968, core samples produced a variety of 19th century artifacts typical of a steamboat. This evidence was enough to justify full-scale excavation of the site.



EXCAVATION

Throughout the spring and summer of 1968, heavy equipment was used to strip away the soil burying the boat. The water table was encountered only 10 feet below the surface, but the wreck itself lay 18 feet below this level. Lowering the water level required the insertion of 210 well points and continuous pumping. Finally in late October, contact was made with the vessel. However, positive identification was not made until November 25, 1968, when a shipping crate bearing a crudely scrawled "Bertrand Stores" was found. The search for the *Bertrand* was over at last.

Excavation resumed the next season. By mid-summer, the deck was cleared and revealed that earlier salvors had removed the engines, paddlewheel, and some cargo. Only nine of the expected 500 flasks of mercury were recovered. None of the rumored whiskey or gold was on board. Instead, the ship yielded some 10,000 cubic feet of handtools, clothes, foodstuffs, furnishings, munitions, and personal effects. In all, over 200,000 artifacts were recovered. Many of these were in an excellent state of preservation.

By the fall of 1969, all cargo was removed. To protect the vessel, the empty hull was padded with sand. The well points were removed, and the water level was allowed to rise. Once again, the *Bertrand* returned to a watery grave.



PHOTO BY P. MICHAEL WHYE

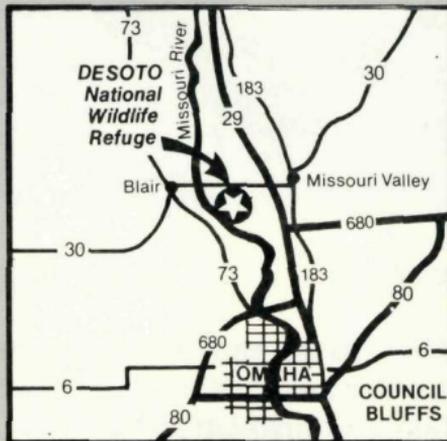
PRESERVATION

Following excavation, artifacts were washed and wrapped in plastic to keep them moist until they could be treated. Stabilizing the collection has taken over a decade of work by professional conservators from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. Today, the artifacts are housed and displayed in environmentally-controlled chambers in the DeSoto Visitor Center. These stable conditions provide the greatest possible protection for the artifacts. Even so, monitoring and specialized treatment of artifacts continue today.

A MOMENT FROZEN IN TIME

In her day, the *Bertrand* was neither unique nor famous. Like dozens of other vessels, she carried picks and shovels to open the mines, hammers and saws to build new towns, plows to break sod, clothes and food to protect and feed settlers. She also carried luxuries like silk and champagne for those who could afford them. Her cargo vividly illustrates the needs and desires of the American frontier, and the developing technologies of the 19th century. These artifacts are a time capsule. From them we can learn what life was like on the frontier, and how it may have differed from our own. The true treasure of the *Bertrand* is that it represents a moment frozen in time — a time that no longer exists, but which can still be shared by all.

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge is one of many refuges administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. DeSoto, like other refuges, is dedicated to the preservation and conservation of wildlife. The DeSoto Visitor Center is open from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, except New Years Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The *Bertrand* excavation site and other recreational facilities are open daily, daylight hours only.



**For Further Information Contact:
Refuge Manager
DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge
1434 316th Lane
Missouri Valley, IA 51555
(712) 642-2772**

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.