

Transcribed Excerpts from the Iowa Patriot Letter about Important Rivers for Settlement, July 18, 1839

Burlington, Io. July, 1839.

My Dear Friend

It is only by reason of the rivers that water this country, the arteries by which life is maintained in it, that it can have any value, or could become the abode of the population destined to fill or that is now within it. These channels of trade and intercourse, in furnishing an easy highway for the transport of passengers and goods into a country that must otherwise be reached by long and laborious travel and could only receive supplies and send out its produce by yet more laborious and precarious means, have made it accessible and brought it by the aid of steam into contiguity with places separated from it by long centuries of miles. I must therefore not omit to mention the rivers of the territory though you have in relation to the most important of them more information than I shall communicate, and are not without some knowledge of the smaller ones.

The Mississippi has its course for 600 miles of navigable water from St. Anthony's falls to the northern bound of Missouri, a little below the Des Moines rapids, along the border of this territory ... The river is constantly traversed by steam boats to Galena and Dubuque about 200 miles above this, which carry passengers, emigrants and merchandize to those intermediate places, and return with lead, the produce of the "diggings" at those points and take in occasionally our surplus grain at this place, to supply the lower country.

The navigation of this glorious river is obstructed by two sets of rapids in passing through this territory. The first however called the upper rapids terminating near Davenport about 90 miles above this is a very slight impediment if any at all. Its channel has at the lowest stages of water from eight feet to a depth not reached by a fourteen feet pole, and is generally of a sufficient breadth; though in the upper part it is rather intricate and narrow. The lower rapids, so called begin about 30 miles below this place and ten below Madison, extending about 12 miles, and at low stages of water are impassable by large boats. This set consists of four chains of ledges, called upper chain, Lamallee's, English, and Lower chain, and is of extremely difficult navigation, the channel being for the most part very shoal, intricate and narrow. The English chain has two channels. The one, near this bank, has but two and a half feet in great part at low water. The other, near the eastern bank, has generally six feet or more but is so narrow and intricate as to be almost impracticable or at any rate very dangerous. The government has made some inadequate appropriations for improving this navigation, and some of the ledge has been removed. We shall no doubt give them a loud call to make a thorough work of it, and remove so

much as to make the passage over these rapids safe and commodious for all hosts navigating the upper Mississippi. The wealth that goes down over them requires it. The wants of the population crowding Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin above them on both sides will require it: and it must be done...

The whole extent of navigable water in this territory not including lakes will at the lowest estimate exceed twenty-five hundred miles:

Mississippi	600	
Missouri (about)	1200	
Des Moines	150	
Iowa and Cedar	120	
To which add for all others including St. Peters, Red and James,		500 at least
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	2570	

Waters go out from or pass our limits that will transport as to Hudson's Bay and the gulf of Mexico, to Pennsylvania and the Rocky Mountains...

Yours, &c.