

## Swimming Nevada to Far Island

I had the incredibly good fortune to grow up on a Minnesota dairy farm during the 1950's.

The Mississippi River was just a mile east of our farm.

There were six islands on the river, five were conveniently reachable by foot or horseback.

The sixth island, which we called Far Island, was on the far side of the river's main channel.

Far Island was hard to reach.

There was a popular swimming spot for boys of all ages on the upstream end of Big Island.

It was busy on summer evenings. I call it young boy's swimming hole, because I never saw an adult or a female there.

There was a single rope swing attached to a big tree that leaned over a minor cross channel.

The cross channel was 40 feet wide and separated the Big Island, which was 60 acres in size, from the smallest island which was called Swimming Hole Island.

I always rode my horse, Nevada, when I went to the swimming hole, on summer evenings.

Always bare back, with a bridle only.

The first photo is of a horse that looks remarkably like Nevada walking in the river.

I had been considering swimming Nevada across the main channel of the Mississippi river for some time.

I had been preparing him by riding deeper and deeper into the water.

In a short time, Nevada was perfectly comfortable with entering and splashing in the river.

Horses are naturally good swimmers.



Map shows the route from our farm, across the river and back.

But I wanted to make certain that he did not panic, or struggle to lose me in the middle of the river.

I was also concerned that we navigated correctly so we hit the Far Island.

I did not know how long the crossing would take, nor whether he would be able to swim against the current if we were swept downstream.

There were many huge, submerged boulders in the main channel which were visible at low water.

I was concerned that Nevada might injure a leg by kicking an underwater boulder.

I estimated (guessed) where we would hit the shore of Far Island, and we plunged in.

For some distance Nevada was walking on the bottom of the river.

Most large boulders were detectable by the disturbance they created in the water.

I used the reins to help Nevada avoid those.

I was riding bareback without a pad.

As we reached deeper water Nevada switched to swimming smoothly.

Horses swim with their bodies deep in water.

I wrapped a chunk of mane around one hand to stay with the horse.

He initially had some difficulty keeping his nostrils out of the water but soon mastered that.

While Nevada was swimming, I let the reins slack.

He could see Far Island as well as I could.

Several times I could feel him hit a boulder, but not too hard.

I have inserted two photos of swimming horses to show how deep their bodies run in the water.

We made it to the island, without any trouble.

We explored for half an hour.

I was tempted to finish the trip to Sherburne County, but it was getting dark.

That had to wait for another day.

The return trip was uneventful.

Tom.



PS. I can tell you that when we did cross to the Sherburne County bank, people were surprised to see a soaked kid and a dripping horse come out of the river.