

THE LOST CITY OF CAHOKIA

In the 12th century, Cahokia, resting on the banks of the Mississippi, was the heart of a culture that spread across what is now the eastern United States. But the thriving city was mysteriously abandoned. Was the river itself to blame?

The city covered 15 square km with long avenues dotted with 120 mounds of shaped earth. The tallest was over 30m high.

Up to 20,000 people lived in Cahokia and they all relied on the river: fishing and building irrigation canals to water their crops.

By the late 1300s, the city had been abandoned – but why? It's possible that so many trees were cut down for firewood that the land flooded regularly, devastating the crops that fed the city. Only the river knows the truth.

The tale of Cahokia is just one of the amazing stories that the Mississippi can tell, and as we follow it from source to sea, we shall hear many more . . .

The city was a busy port. Boats from faraway places arrived, laden with copper and other treasures to trade.

Local people called the river Misi-ziibi ('great river').



Travelling the length of the United States, the Mississippi river supplies water to millions of people, and it is home to more than 1,000 animal species. When its source, Minnesota's Lake Itasca, freezes in winter, the river still flows from it, fed by warm underground springs.

A droplet of water takes three months to journey from the cold lake to the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico. On our journey, we'll discover stories of adventure and hardship, music and mystery, and a lost city from long ago . . .



The Mississippi river has reversed its flow several times. In 1812, an earthquake caused a fluvial tsunami, sending the river back where it came from.

LINCOLN'S JOURNEY

As a teenager, future president Abraham Lincoln travelled about 1,500km down the Mississippi. His boat was loaded with pork and potatoes to sell in New Orleans. The journey brought him face-to-face with the cruelty of slavery in the south.

SHOWTIME

Showboats were floating theatres. Between the 1830s and 1930s, they brought song and dance shows – with circus performers and real horses – to towns up and down the river. Some boats could seat 3,400 spectators!

GHOST TOWN

Cairo, Illinois, was a bustling town in the 1800s when steamboats powered up and down the river. But as new bridges were built elsewhere, traffic bypassed the town. Businesses closed down and people abandoned Cairo. The historic buildings remain, slowly decaying, witnesses to a lost age.

Cairo

MYSTERIOUS MISSOURIUM

In 1840, the bones of a mastodon (prehistoric relative of the elephant) were dug up in Missouri. Museum owner Albert Koch added extra bones to create a huge 10m-long beast. When he took this 'Missourium' to London, experts exposed it as a fake.

KENTUCKY

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

A secret organization called the Underground Railroad helped people escape slavery in the south. African Americans working on riverboats hid some of the 'freedom seekers' and sailed them northwards.

The boats often left by night. Slaves unable to catch one had to walk north to Canada.

TENNESSEE

FIT FOR A KING

Graceland, a luxurious mansion in Memphis, was the home of Elvis Presley, the 'King of Rock and Roll'. Its 23 rooms included a jungle room, complete with an indoor waterfall!

Memphis

THE COMPOSER

In 1933, Florence Price, who was born in Arkansas, became the first African American woman to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra. Mississippi River Suite uses folk tunes to recreate life along the river.

ARKANSAS

MISSISSIPPI

SPLITTING THE SOUTH

During the American Civil War (1861–65), Ulysses S Grant, general of the northern army, plotted to capture the lower Mississippi to split the territory of his enemies in the south. On 4 July 1863, he captured Vicksburg, and turned the tide of the war.

Vicksburg

LOUISIANA

HURRICANE KATRINA

In August 2005, a tropical storm tore across the river's delta, killing 1,464 people and causing damage costing \$70 billion. Hurricane Katrina destroyed the walls built to stop the river overflowing, so much of New Orleans was flooded.

New Orleans

Gulf of Mexico

MUSIC OF THE DELTA

Jazz and blues, the African American musical forms that helped create modern pop, were born where the Mississippi meets the sea. Jazz is joyful, but the blues draws on unhappy memories, often of slavery. Mississippian blues guitarist Robert Johnson was so talented that some said he had sold his soul to the devil.

Flat-bottomed steamboats had powerful steam engines that turned paddle wheels to push them through the water.

