

# Horses Don't Spook While on West Bluff

*Tales of Earlier Days*

By Bob Dewel

I'll bet that more than a score of our readers, having climbed to the crest of the West Bluff at Devils Lake, have gasped and stepped back a bit when they peeked over the rocky edge to the lake below.

It's not just the height, but the prospect of rocky ledges and the possibility of landing in the water, perhaps unconscious from the fall. Some may report a feeling of being drawn by unknown forces to fall away from your lofty perch.

Well, suppose you are a horse---how would the precipitous aspect affect you? They say horses have more sense than humans—they even call it horse sense, but look at the pictures. Here are horses on the crest of the bluffs, thanks to their masters. Were they to spook, several humans might also lose their footing, if not their lives.

Attached are actual pictures of horses on the West Bluff, and they once were a common sight in long ago summers. The horses are said to have been ridden to the top, not on an easy circuitous route, but up the marked trail that hikers use today, approaching from the North. Incidentally, the name of one of the pictured horses is "Bob".

My source of the photos and information is Nita Trapp, who along with her sisters Marilyn and Mona were members of the Trapp family. Their Father, Le Moine "Bun" Trapp had up to 25 horses in a riding stable in the Depression years and well after. It was near the North Shore entrance to the Park. (This is not "Bun the Baker", a local character whom we have mentioned in another story.)

This location gave riders easy access to the Park, and it was not unusual for a rider to ascend the nearby trail to the crest of the West Bluff. It is assumed that on parts of the trail the rider dismounted, allowing the horse to select his footing while he did the bidding of his human masters.

As the picture shows, the horses were led close to the edge, where the horse could experience the height. Probably the horses in these photos were already accustomed to the view. This did not prevent a small animal or other sounds from spooking a horse, with humans in the picture in rather precarious positions themselves.



The South Shore of Devils Lake can be seen in this photo of a man and a horse at the top of the West Bluff. This photo is taken from a promotional brochure of the time, which accounts for the vertical crease and the clown in the lower left. At the lake edge several cottages can be seen, all them gone by around 1970. The largely untouched South Bluff looms large in the background.

Nita remembers that at one time they had some 16 horses on the bluff at the same time. Some rides went to Steinke Basin and the East Bluff. Sometimes a night ride was featured, with a fire and hot dogs and similar picnic selections. This was apparently near Deppe Park on Lake Street. People sang then, sometimes with good harmony, and the picnics lasted until 11 P.M.

Bun Trapp must have had a good sense of humor, for among the hundreds of artifacts of that time in Nita's home is a placard reading "A good woman is like a great horse—Faithful, but hard to lead." It is assumed that Mrs. Trapp had a good or at least tolerant sense of humor.



**Everyone in the picture (and also both horses), is in a precarious position in this photo. Had one of the horses spooked, there could have been casualties. Note the man, partially hidden, standing on the rump of one of the animals.**