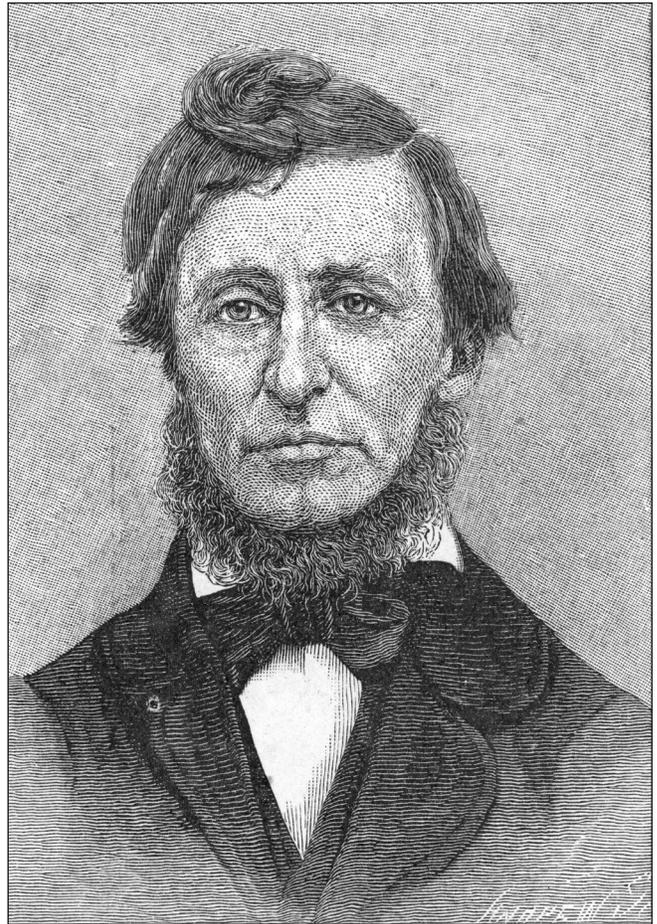


# H. D. Thoreau: Wisconsin Tourist

Henry David Thoreau seldom ventured far from Concord. His most far-reaching excursion did, however, carry him across the state of Wisconsin. Thoreau and 17-year-old traveling companion Horace Mann, Jr., son of the famed educator, set out from Concord on May 11, 1861. They traveled overland to the Mississippi River, putting in at East Dubuque, then up to the St. Paul area, going as far west as Red Wing, Minnesota, before returning down the Mississippi and disembarking at Prairie du Chien on June 27. They traveled by train across southern Wisconsin, following the Wisconsin River, passing through Madison, the Kettle Moraine area, and finally arriving at Milwaukee, where they boarded a lake ferry to continue their return journey.

Thoreau's travel notebook is devoted largely to botanical observations with many references to trees. Thoreau held the white pine in special reverence, once writing that "it is as immortal as I am and perchance will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still." As his Mississippi riverboat passed La Crosse, the only observation of the region worthy enough to be penned in his notebook was "White Pine began half a dozen miles above La Crosse."

Another species that caught Thoreau's eye and imagination during the trip was the wild apple. His first observation of this species occurred on the train ride through Illinois to the Mississippi. He noted: "flowered apple-like trees." Then while staying at a boarding house on Lake Calhoun in Minnesota, he made a special effort to locate and identify a cluster of wild apples. No doubt, while traveling through



Henry David Thoreau

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi 10828

Wisconsin he observed additional clusters of wild apples along the train route. These discoveries provided some thoughts for an essay entitled "Wild Apples," written upon his return to New England and shortly before his death in 1862. In this essay Thoreau described the fight of the wild apple for survival from browsing cows and the encroachment of civilization.