

Shawneetown

1. Some rows up, but we floats down,
Way down the Ohio to Shawneetown

**And it's hard on the beach oar,
she moves too slow
Way down to Shawneetown
on the Ohio.**

2. Whisky's in the jug, boys;
wheat is in the sack.
We'll run on down to Shawneetown
and bring the rock salt back.

3. Now the current's got her boys,
take in some slack
And run on down to Shawneetown
and bushwhack her back.

4. Got a wife in Louisville, and one in
New Orleans
And when I get to Shawneetown gonna
see my Indian Queen.

5. The weather's mighty warm boys,
the water's thick and dank
And the fog is so goddam thick
you cannot see the bank.

6. Yes some rows up, but we floats down
Way down the Ohio to Shawneetown

**And it's hard on the beach oar,
she moves too slow
Way down to Shawneetown
on the Ohio**

Sing with Johnny Collins at
<https://youtu.be/Jv-URfq-rbo>

Notes

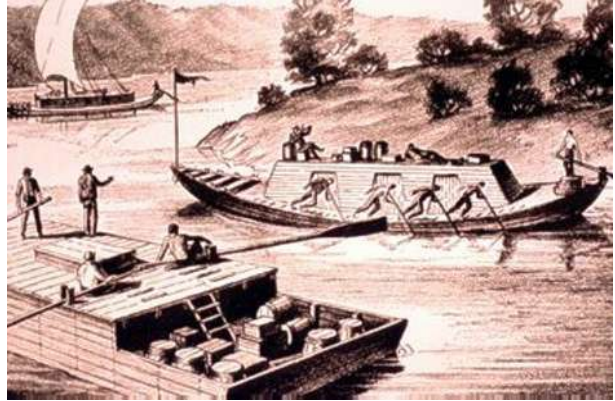
Deep south riverboat song, collected by Dillon Bustin.

Alternative names: Hard on the beach oar,
Shawnee Town

Shawneetown - in Illinois, on the Ohio River of course. Since most of the town and its people were moved upstream after flooding in 1937, the original port is now known as Old Shawneetown.
[\[https://www.britannica.com/place/Shawneetown\]](https://www.britannica.com/place/Shawneetown)

Bushwack - fight your way through woodland or undergrowth where no path exists.

The song is about using a keelboat or flatboat:



Flatboat (foreground) and Keelboat, around Pittsburgh, late 18th century.
via [wikimedia commons](#)

Sandy Paton wrote on [Mudcat](#) that Malcolm Dalglish and Grey Larsen recorded "Shawneetown" on LP *The First of Autumn* (June Appal JA026). What follows is taken from the booklet that accompanied the album.

We learned "Shawneetown" from a good friend of ours, Dillon Bustin. Dillon learned part of the song when he was young from a year-round fisherman on the White River in Indiana. Since then he has picked up verses from travel logs and novels of the keelboat era. He even made up one of the verses.

Shawneetown is an Ohio River town in southern Illinois just a little south of the Wabash River junction. The town was the first Anglo settlement on the Ohio and before 1830 was the major trade centre for Illinois settlers and the Indians. The nearby salt mines provided the town's major commodity.

The most efficient commercial boats in those days were the keelboats. Unlike flatboats and rafts, which only travelled downriver, the keelboats made the difficult trip back as well. In the days before steam power, and before present dams tamed the river's currents, the methods for getting a boat back up river (whether "cordelling" or "bushwacking") involved the crew literally pulling the boat against the current. While a downriver trip from Cincinnati to New Orleans took only a few weeks, the return trip took several months.

... The use of the **beach oar**, a long oar that most river craft had to guide the boat as well as to physically manoeuvre it off mud slicks and snags, was the main work of the downriver course.