A STATE WATER TRAIL GUIDE TO THE MINNESOTA (Ortonville to Granite Falls), includes the Pomme de Terre and Chippewa Rivers

Flowing through a wide valley carved out by the ancient river Warren, the Minnesota River is rich in natural beauty. Traveling from Ortonville to Granite Falls, the carry-inist will see a diversity of terrain, from marshy lowlands to steep granite bluffs.

A wide variety of vegetation also fringes the river. Carry-ins may be surprised to see prickly pear cactus along the route.

From Ortonville to Marsh Lake, trees and vines overhang the river and give it a jungle-like appearance. Dark woods of soft maples, cottonwood and elm fringe the banks. Snags and broken-down bridges create obstacles.

The river broadens near Marsh Lake. Large areas of swamp and marsh extend from the river, silt and reed. Thousands of birds use this stretch of the river corridor for nesting, breeding and resting during migrations.

There are several species of waterfowl, including mallards, blue-winged teal and wood ducks. The most impressive waterfowl along the river is the Canada goose, many of which are found at Lac qui Parle. Waterfowl and birds such as various species of herons, bitterns and shorebirds make their summer home along the river. Pheasants and gray (hungarian) partridge find thick cover in the river valley to settlement; the Minnesota River valley had been all but trapped out. Game animals were scarce; the buffalo had been driven to the plains of the upper Missouri and the Red River Valley. In the mid-19th century the Minnesota River valley had been all but trapped out. Game animals were scarce; the buffalo had been driven to the plains of the upper Missouri and the Red River Valley.

The Traver Des Sieurs treaty of 1851 opened the river valley to settlement; the Minnesota carried passengers and goods to the growing communities.

In 1862, Dakota discontent with the white man, erupted into the Dakota Conflict. At Camp Release, near Montevideo, the Dakota released 267 prisoners taken during the fighting.

The Chippewa River

Joseph Nicolle ascended the Chippewa River from its mouth on August 5, 1838. He described the Minnesota River as doubling in volume at the mouth of the Chippewa, which was a wide river with a clear, sandy bottom.

At the southeastern end of Lac qui Parle, called “talking water” by the Dakota, is Lac qui Parle State Park. Within the park are miles of back channels which support an abundant wildlife population. In addition to various species of water birds, ducks, geese, heron, eider, beaver and muskrat inhabit this area.

Fishing

The Minnesota also supports a large fish population. Although carp and other rough fish predominate, anglers can take walleyes, northern pike and smallmouth bass in deep pools and riffles below rapids and dams.

From the Lac qui Parle dam to Granite Falls the river flows in a 105 to 150-foot wide-channel through a wide flood plain. Below Montevideo granite outcrops become prevalent. There are light rapids above and below Granite Falls.

Because of possible mercury contamination, keep smaller fish for eating, release the older, larger fish which have a higher concentration of contamination. People, especially women of childbearing age and children, should strictly adhere to guidelines set by the Minnesota Department of Health. Complete information is available by calling 1-800-627-3529.

The Dakota called the Chippewa River, Maya-wa-kawa-wapan, meaning “remarkable river with steep places.” The gradient of the Chippewa River is 4.2 feet per mile. It is considered primarily a flat water river with some riffles and Class I rapids. The banks are heavily wooded as it meanders through the farmland of southwestern Minnesota. There are many bluffs, some 150 to 200 feet high, adding to the beauty of the river.

The Pomme de Terre River

The Pomme de Terre River is the northern-most tributary of the Minnesota River. It is named for the potato like native plant used as food by the Dakota inhabiting the area. Pomme de terre is French for potato.

The Pomme de Terre River runs through a variety of land types, including low bluffs, woods, pasture and some farmland. Watch for farm fences that may be strung across the river. The gradient of the Pomme de Terre River is 4.1 feet per mile on average.

Planning a Safe River Trip

A successful river trip is safe. To enjoy a safe journey, you should be prepared by acquainting yourself with your route. Choose a distance that is comfortable for you.

Water levels can speed up or slow down your trip; get information about water levels from the regional DNR office, DNR website, or DNR Information Center. Protect the water and shorelands and leave nothing behind you except footprints. Remember that most of the shorelands are privately owned.

• Travel with a companion or group. Plan your trip with a map before you depart and advise someone of your plans, including planned departure and arrival times.
• Most people paddle two to three river miles per hour.
• Bring a first-aid kit that includes waterproof matches.
• Be cautious of river obstructions, such as overhanging and dead trees in the river.
• You must pack out all trash.
• Leave only footprints; take only photographs!

Boating Information

• Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device that state law requires to be on board the craft.
• Bring an extra paddle.
• Not all portions of this water trail are suitable for motor use.
• Register your watercraft. All watercraft more than 9 feet in length, including nonmotorized carry-ins and kayaks, must be registered in Minnesota or your state of residence.
• Public rest areas are available along the route to rest, picnic and explore.

Sustainable Ecosystems

Outdoor recreation is dependent on a healthy and attractive natural environment. Sustainable outdoor recreation enables people to enjoy the outdoors without negative impacts on the environment.

Communities working together can improve water resources by promoting environmentally sensitive land-use practices along rivers and throughout watersheds.

Natural shoreline buffers improve water quality by filtering out pollutants and sediments. Healthy and diverse native shoreline plant communities are attractive and provide important habitat for birds and wildlife.

This section of the Minnesota river begins as a narrow, meandering stream and ends as a broader channel containing gentle rapids with views of granite outcroppings amongst wooded bluffs. In between, you will pass through flood plain forest, extensive backwaters, marshes and openwater reservoirs.