The Upper Minnesota River Valley is one of the most impressive landscapes in southwestern Minnesota. The vegetation found along the floodplain-silver maple, willow, cottonwood and ash-is a pleasing contrast to the upland bluffs of red cedar and pockets of prairie grasses.

The Minnesota River

A gentle river seldom interrupted by rapids, the Minnesota is one of the few canoeable rivers in southwestern Minnesota and offers some of the most impressive landscapes in this part of the state.

The stretch between Granite Falls and Minnesota Highway 4 is rich in Minnesota history. From Granite Falls to North Redwood Minnesota Highway 4 flows through an area of granite outcrops. Some outcrops are the oldest rocks discovered in North America, dating back more than three billion years. The banks along this stretch of river are heavily forested with maple, elm, cottonwood and willow. Away from the river the high granite domes are covered with cedar and oak.

Before the 1862 Dakota Conflict, the Upper Sioux Agency (river mile 240) was one of the disposal points where the U.S. government distributed food, supplies and annual payments to the Dakota Indians, who were confined by treaties to reservations along the river.

The agency was also an educational center where Indians were taught farming, carpentry and other skills valued by white civilization. During the uprising white settlers abandoned the agency and the Dakota burned it to the ground. Today the area is preserved in Upper Sioux Agency State Park.

The rapids were named after Charles Patterson, an early trader who established a trading post at the rapids in 1783. Sacred Heart Creek, which enters the Minnesota here, and the nearby town of Sacred Heart also owe their names to Patterson. The trader wore a bear skin hat and, since the bear was a sacred animal to the Dakota, they called him the Sacred Hat man; this name later became Sacred Heart.

The area near Patterson’s Rapids was the site of a short-lived gold rush in the 1890s. Discovered in 1894, the gold vein was soon depleted and the boom town of Springville got through the door nothing could stop us to the valley as far as to St. Paul, and this if we got through the door nothing could stop us to the valley. Chief Big Eagle later said: ‘I thought the fort was the door to the valley as far as to St. Paul, and this if we got through the door nothing could stop us to the valley.”

In the summer of 1862 the Dakota faced starvation when their government annuities were delayed by bureaucratic red tape. During the resultant Dakota Conflict the Indians attacked settlements throughout the river valley and prepared to overrun the small garrison at Fort Ridgely. Chief Big Eagle later explained: ‘We thought the fort was the door to the valley as far as to St. Paul, and this if we got through the door nothing could stop us to the valley.”

Valley settlers, some escaping the Dakota by means of the Redwood Ferry (river mile 198.8), had flocked to the fort for protection. There they withstood Indian attacks until they reached the fort and for protection from harsh winter storms.

Fishing
The Minnesota River also supports a large and relatively diverse fish population. Although carp and other riverine fish predominate, anglers searching the snags and roots wads can occasionally hook flathead catfish exceeding 10 pounds. Walleyes, sauger, and white bass are fairly numerous and vulnerable to angling when congregated. Anglers may also catch an occasional northern pike, smallmouth bass, and shovelnose sturgeon. Anglers fishing backwaters areas can occasionally find bluegill and black crappie.

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 much of the shorelands are privately owned.

Planning a Safe River Trip
- Bring drinking water. It is only available at a limited number of rest areas. Drinking river water is not recommended, but if you do it must be treated.
- Respect private property. Stop only at designated sites; much of the shoreline is private property.
- Be sanitary. Use designated toilet facilities or bury human waste away from the river.

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.

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