RED RIVER OF THE NORTH

A State Water Trail Guide

RED RIVER ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Except during floods, the Red River of the North is slow-moving and picturesque with its tree-covered banks and frequent wildlife sightings. It is serene and quiet even as the Red passes through cities. Reminders of the past are found in the muddy banks where bone bones occasionally are exposed. These muddy banks may make access difficult. There are no cops except at some of the dams. Low flows expose rocks and snags creating hazards for rowboats and occasionally block the channel.

Note: River miles are counted beginning at the mouth of the Red River at Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba, and ending at Pembina, ND. The map is a customized version of a map published by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Right (R) and left (L) refer to right and left banks, respectively, when facing downstream.

274.6 Oslo, MN. Trailer access (R). Concrete ramp. Primitive camping, fire ring, and parking. For more information call Oslo City Hall at 218-695-3861.

274.8 Highway 54/1 bridge. vicinity of 274.8 Oslo City Park/Campground, 0.4 miles from the Oslo boat ramp. Campground with electricity and water. Tent sites, showers, shelter with picnic tables. For more information call Oslo City Hall at 218-695-3861.

246.4 July Ferry Wildlife Management Area (L). Primitive camping allowed. No facilities or identified camping sites. See the sign for “Wildlife Management Area.” Call ND Game and Fish at 701-662-3107 for more information. See http://gf.nd.gov/ for current regulations.

The ND Game and Fish Department is acquiring other wildlife management areas adjacent to the Red River in this area. Call the ND Game and Fish Department at 701-662-3107 for latest information.

209.0 Hastings Landing Trailer access (L). Downtown Drayton, ND. Parking, fishing platform. Short walk to downtown. 0.5 miles to Schumacher Park Campground. See www.draytonnd.com and call 701-454-5990 or 701-454-3479 for current conditions.

209.0 Schumacher Park, 0.5 miles from Hastings Landing, water, restrooms, showers, shelter, picnic tables, tennis court, playground, and baseball diamonds. Visit www.draytonnd.com or call 701-454-5990 for more information.

217.4 Highway 64/11 bridge.

246.2 Drayton Dam. CAUTION: This dam is extremely dangerous with two dams that have caused several deaths. N. The dam is not accessible, but the ND side (left) has the best elevation for viewing. Adjacent to the dam is the ND side of the best elevation for viewing the dam and because of frequent flooding. Downstream of the dam is a popular fishing location with access from the ND side. No fishing is allowed within 150 feet of the dam.

246.3 Drayton Dam Trailer access (L) and Highways 51/76 Bridge. Downstream of the dam. Parking, boat ramp, shore fishing. Primitive camping. For more information and current conditions call 701-454-5990 or 701-454-3479.

186.0 Hwy 175 Trout Campground (R). Parking. No facilities. Shore Fishing. Hallock, MN is 9 miles east which has 2 campsgrounds and various facilities. See www.hallockmn.org.

204.3 Stanley Dam Campground (L). Concrete boat ramp. Dock. 12 campsites with electricity and water plus additional tent pad sites. Restrooms with showers, picnic tables, shelters, fire rings, fish cleaning station, and playground. Located in Pembina, ND. A short drive takes you to North America’s second oldest Icelandic Church. See cityofpembina.org.

vicinity at 186.0 Pembina State Museum. 9 miles west of state park. Exhibition, observation tower, museum site, nature trail, interpretive programs. For more information call 701-625-6464.

117.5 Highway 29 bridge.

155.8 International Border between the United States and Canada. Before crossing the border contact the U.S. Customs and Border Protection www.cbp.gov and Pembina, ND office at 701-454-5990 and Canada Services Border Agency archaeol.gc.ca and 204-983-3500. The laws of current regulations concerning, but not limited to, border crossing registration and licensing, safety equipment required, firearms, prohibited foods, identification required, and passport/visa requirements before attempting to cross and reenter the border. Usually an appearance is required to reenter border crossing staff at the river.

The MN DNR is developing additional access points in this area. For the latest information call 218-681-0889.

For more information about the Red River visit the River Keepers website at: riverkeepers.org

Map Key

Look for this symbol along the Water Trail.
**RED RIVER HISTORY**

One of the world’s flattest landscapes, the Red River Valley is located on the eastern edge of the Great Plains. By definition, the Red River Valley isn’t a valley in the geologic sense. Instead, it is a remnant of glacial Lake Agassiz, the former floor of a massive, prehistoric lake.

Glacial Waters Create a Lake

Geologists believe Lake Agassiz was formed when massive glaciers began to melt nearly 12,000 years ago. When Lake Agassiz, the most extensive body of water the North American continent ever saw, began slowly draining northward through Canada, and southeasterly toward Minnesota, the Red River of the North was created. The Red River of the North, or the “Rivière Rouge du Nord” as early French Canadian explorers christened it, was probably so-named because of its clay soils, muddy banks, and reddish-brown silt-filled waters.

Early Residents

Nomadic cultures arrived soon after the retreat of the enormous glaciers, following the great herds of bison and caribou. Then, 2,000 years ago, Indians from the forests of Minnesota and Wisconsin began moving into the grassy areas of the Red River Basin. The early 1800s brought the first permanent European settlements to the banks of the Red River in present-day Manitoba. Throughout the century, European immigrants would continue to trickle down from Canada and from the east, settling along the banks of the Red River in the United States.

Early Commerce

The Hudson’s Bay Company controlled commerce in this area for almost two centuries. Trading in bison and beaver hides, they used large canoes and boats to ship goods to Europe via Hudson Bay. The development of the Red River oxcart trail connected that trade route with the Mississippi River and other parts of the United States. As trade continued to flourish, so did the demand for more efficient means of transportation, and by 1859, Anson Northrup, the man and his same-named steamboat, made their debut on the Red. The oxcart trail system was connected with the Hudson’s Bay Company’s steamboat landing near Georgetown and the two systems of land and water transportation were connected. Eventually, steamboats couldn’t compete with the much faster and cheaper railroad which reached Moorhead in 1871. By the turn of the century, steamboats were all but extinct on the Red River of the North.

Current Uses of the Red

Since the end of steamboat travel, the Red River of the North is a much quieter place. At its height, the river hosted public swimming areas, a 140-foot ski jump tower, and even a floating amusement park. Today, its tree-lined banks offer serenity often forgotten just steps away in the lively cities that lie alongside it. Currently the Red River is undergoing a resurgence with new adjacent park facilities, a tour boat service, dam safety initiatives, and increasing recreational use.

**FLORA AND FAUNA**

The tree-lined banks and flowing water are almost an oddity in the vast flat prairie that surrounds the river corridor. Wildlife, plants, and fish rarely found just 10 miles away may be abundant in the Red River environment. Fishing on the Red River Channel catfish and a diverse population of other fish provide abundant angling opportunities in the Red. Species such as northern pike, goldeye, carp, and a largely undisputed population of walleye lie within its waters. There is an international effort underway to reintroduce the lake sturgeon, which was decimated by overfishing and dams. It’s the only fish species that doesn’t have an open season on the Red. Wildlife and Plants Along the Red

Birdwatchers will enjoy sight-seeing bald eagles, wood ducks, great blue herons, Canada geese, pileated woodpeckers, hawks, and owls. Yellow warblers, redstarts, Baltimore orioles, and indigo buntings can provide a flash of color to the quiet canoeist. During seasonal migrations the corridor can be a place with bird sounds. Lower water levels expose holes in the banks used by “bank” beavers instead of their traditional hats. Other wildlife, such as raccoon, mink, squirrel, shank, woodchuck, and occasionally bear and moose visit the banks of the Red. Some canoeists have reported seeing more than 100 white-tailed deer in a single day.

The distribution of plant species within the riparian forest is determined by their location within the flood plain. Look for willow, cottonwood, and box elder close to the water and oak, ash, and elm further up the bank. Over the years plant species have changed due to impacts from European settlement and Dutch elm disease.

Large stumps mark the site where huge cottonwoods towered over the Red. They were removed to decrease flooding caused by snag-created dams. Minnesota’s second largest peach leaf willow tree is on the banks of the Red adjacent to the Hjemkomst Center in Moorhead. Flowering vines and shrubs, including the prairie rose, provide seasonal color. Beyond the riparian forest are vast fields of cropland including corn, wheat, soybeans, and sugar beets.

**PLANNING A SAFE RIVER TRIP**

The average slope of the Red River is just one-half foot per mile, which makes the Red a slow-moving, easily navigable river. However, high winds have been known to create whitecaps. It features channel widths of less than 100 feet to more than 500 feet at its northern reaches. At bank-full conditions, average depths vary from 10 to 30 feet. Its flow can be widely fluctuating. Devastating floods may be associated with summer rain storms and spring thaw.

**Boating Information**

• Wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD), which state law requires to be on board.
• Check weather forecasts and flow rates.
• Use a map, know your route, and tell someone of your plans.
• Bring a first aid kit and know how to use it.
• Dams may not be marked. Refer to this map for locations.

**Boating Safety**

• Minimize wakes in developed areas and when passing canoes and boats.
• Avoid the spread of exotic aquatic species: mndnr.gov/exotics
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**Access, Rest Areas and Camping Sites**

• Formal access sites are limited. Road right-of-ways adjacent to bridge crossings may be used for canoe access but overnight parking is rarely allowed.
• Spring and summer flooding or low water conditions may cause access sites to be unusable. Call ahead or check web sites for current conditions.
• Formal camping sites are limited adjacent to the river. They may be too far apart for certain trip lengths. Most riverfront property is privately owned. Ask for permission before camping. Consult websites and state maps for other park locations.

**Boating Information**

• Be aware that this river touches two states. Each may have different regulations, especially regarding personal watercraft (jet skis).
• Avoid the spread of exotic aquatic species: mndnr.gov/exotics
• Minnesota requires all watercraft, including canoes and kayaks, to be registered in Minnesota or state of residence.
• Low water conditions may not be suitable for boating. Snags are common. Leave motors unlocked.

**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.

**MINNESOTA AS AN OFFICIAL CANOE TRAIL**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is an equal opportunity organization. This information is available in alternative formats upon request.