

## Tales of Water Trails: Cannon River

Welcome to 'Tales of Water Trails' presented by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Our guests, Lynne and Bob Diebel, are experienced canoeists and kayakers who have paddled more than 2,400 miles of Minnesota water trails. They describe these routes for other travelers in their two books, *Paddling Northern Minnesota* and *Paddling Southern Minnesota*.

For this series of programs, the Diebels are sharing their insights about Minnesota's state water trails. The Minnesota DNR manages over 4,000 miles of water trails for canoeing and kayaking including the north shore of Lake Superior and dozens of rivers statewide.

Here are Lynne Diebel and Bob Diebel, talking about paddling on the Cannon River.

Lynne:

If you're willing to portage, you can float the Cannon all the way from Faribault to the Mississippi through beautiful bluff country. It's about a sixty-mile journey and it'll take you through the Cannon Wilderness County Park, the little towns of Dundas and Northfield, Cannon Falls and Welch. You have to go around the dam at Northfield. The Malt-O-Meal Dam is a big barrier and you have to portage the dam at Lake Byllesby, but the bluff country is worth the effort. The Cannon is one of Minnesota's wild and scenic rivers.

Bob:

The river changes its personality as it goes down toward the Mississippi. It starts out kind of meandering and slow up by the lakes where it originates. It goes down through the rapid descent, down through where you see a lot of tubers by Welch, down below the Cannon Falls Dam. The river then goes down to the bottomland, the marsh area down by the Mississippi where it goes into several threads where you could actually get lost if you're not careful and don't consult your map.

So, there's a lot of different paddling experiences and it could be a camping trip along the river or you could do day paddles.

Lynne:

It's a lively river but it would be just fine for beginning paddlers who are wanting to improve their river skills. You'll do a few little class I rapids, some riffles. It's also a great place for fishermen! Small mouth bass and northerns and walleye, and below Cannon Falls, people fish for channel cats.

Bob:

Another way to paddle this river is to include paddling the Straight as part of the trip. The Straight flows into it, and actually at the junction looks more like the main channel. It's a trip that you could take for about twenty miles down the Straight before you get to the Cannon and then take the Cannon as far as you want to go from there.

Lynne:

And we're going to describe the Straight in another segment, but the route on the Cannon – one of the fun trips is from Faribault to Northfield. That takes you, as I said, through Cannon Wilderness Park. Or you can go from Cannon Falls all the way to Red Wing; that's the trip that takes you through the Cannon Bottoms. One of the cool things about that trip is that if you like to do a bicycle shuttle for your canoe trips, the Cannon Valley Bike Trail is the perfect route for a bike shuttle on that river.

Bob:

I'm glad you mentioned that. One of the things that people often forget about – particularly in the winter when they think about summer paddling coming up – is the shuttle, and the sometimes unpleasant details of all the car travel you have to do to get your time on the river. And the bicycle shuttle that's available here makes it a lot more pleasant. In fact, we used to take the bicycle in the canoe with us on many of the trips, so that we would get out at the end, get right on the bike, and head right back toward the car.

Lynne:

The beauty of the Cannon Valley is the bluffs. Some of them are up to 360 feet high. There's sandstone and limestone outcrops, in the spring you'll find wildflowers, there's a lot of wildlife especially in the Cannon Wilderness County Park, and it's an absolute haven for waterfowl in the Cannon Bottoms.

Bob:

As far as safety considerations, of course you have to look out for deadfalls in any river. If the water is really flowing at a high volume that can be a hazard. And there are several dams. The dam at Northfield in particular is a long portage around because there's so many walls that have been built in the town that make it difficult to get in and out a short distance above and below the dam.

Down in the bottoms of course there's a tremendous number of deadfalls that you need to watch out for.

Lynne:

And then Highway 61. Between Welch and Highway 61 you'll find a lot of deadfalls in there. That's an area you want to avoid unless you're real comfortable paddling rivers. If you do go all the way to Red

Wing you'll be on the Mississippi as well, and that's where you need to be aware that there's some bigger boats out there than your canoe.

Bob:

A lot bigger, and watch out for the waves! It's a good river. Give it a try.