

Tales of Water Trails: Chippewa 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 Chippewa River.

Bob:

The Chippewa River is in the southwestern part of the state, of course, and flows into the Minnesota River. We found this river and a number of others in the southwest corner very pleasant surprises. You might expect, if you've just driven through the area out in what you might call "corn country," that there would not be much good paddling. But in fact the Chippewa and the other rivers that flow into the Minnesota Valley have quite a descent, particularly at the last part of their flow into the river. And that's because, if you look at the Minnesota River, the Minnesota River looks like a puny little river in this huge valley. That's because the valley was carved out after the last glacier melted when the outflow from Lake Agassiz caused the River Warren, to create this huge valley. The rivers that flow in it today are really going down the side of what used to be underwater when the water was flowing through there in great volume. So there's some very exciting paddling in the last four or five miles of a lot of the rivers that go into the Minnesota River.

Lynne:

The Chippewa's got some really high bluffs as it carves its way down the side of the Minnesota. In fact, the Dakota called it the Manya Wakon, which means "of remarkable bluffs." Now, it's not a whitewater river but it is a swift moving river, and we describe about thirty miles of paddling there. It takes you through woods and through farmland. The woods that form along the edge of the river are the cottonwoods and the oaks and that corridor is a bit of a respite from the farmland. It's a good paddle for families, for day paddlers. The ripples will give you a little bit of fun but it's not a wild river.

Bob:

Yes, you can be paddling along and think that you're pretty far from civilization because of the wooded banks, but the wooded protection of the river is often only a couple hundred feet wide before you get to the farm fields and you'll look up sometimes and see cows looking over. I did not find this a negative. I don't feel that good paddling is only in wilderness areas. I like seeing a lot of the features of the river that were created by humans. The bridges – the old bridges in particular – are very interesting. There's a lot of old rusty bridges that are interesting, like the old iron truss bridge at Big Ben City.

Lynne:

That's a pretty little spot along the river. Another pretty spot is the Lentz Access – the wildflowers planted there make it a real welcoming place. What I really loved about the Chippewa was all the white pelicans we saw along there. This is white pelican territory. There are a lot of other birds too, but the white pelicans seem to like this river particularly. And the glacial boulders in the streambed added to the beauty of the place.

Bob:

This is an easy paddle as far as skills. If you're a beginning paddler this would be a great river for you. Of course, there's always deadfalls, high water, and one dam along the way which you need to watch out for, but you don't have to have advanced whitewater skills at all. That's not to say that it isn't exciting. All rivers have that satisfaction of trying to find the "fast lane" or the perfect line down through a bend. It doesn't have to be challenging water to give you the satisfaction of finding the good route right down through the curve.

Lynne:

Thanks for joining us.