

Tales of Water Trails: Crow Wing 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 Crow Wing River.

Lynne:

The Crow Wing offers a lovely mix of clean water, a sandy bottom, easy paddling, wooded banks and nice campsites. It's a great canoe camping river for families or for beginning river paddlers. Our favorite stretch is about a 50-mile stretch between one of the Little Crow Wing lakes down to Knob Hill.

Bob:

The river is not challenging as far as needing whitewater skills. There's some class I rapids, a lot of rapid and riffley water that is a lot of fun to paddle, but because it is not extremely challenging it's good for taking families and groups of scouts as campers.

Lynne:

The first stretch is from Crown Point Rd to County Road 13, which I would say is the prettiest stretch on the river. It's just about four miles long. Absolutely lovely little stretch of river.

The next stretch from County Road 13 to Tree Farm Landing is about 14 miles, and that takes you through some of the Crow Wing lakes. Now the Crow Wing lakes are pretty little lakes that are all strung together by the river, and they're all named by number. So you go through Fourth Crow Wing Lake, Third Crow Wing Lake, Second and First.

From Tree Farm Landing to Anderson's Crossing there is one little class I rapids, and from Anderson's Crossing to Knob Hill you'll meet a few more class I rapids, but the river's shallow and the rapids are very light. It's really a pretty, pretty place and there's a lot of state and county parkland that makes for a remote feeling experience.

Bob:

One of the things that we tried to note as we went down the river was the number of campsites, as well as their condition and whether or not you could actually see them from the river. This river is used enough that the campsites are well developed and comfortable, there are a lot of them along the way. There are a lot of signs that are quite visible that help you in locating them. So it's a great camping river.

Lynne:

One of the cool things about the Crow Wing is that it's fed by another river called the Shell. When you paddle the Shell, the water's clear and you can see the little shell fragments for which the river is named, the mussel shell fragments, lining up with the current. They form these beautiful patterns on the bottom of the river. And the same is true on the Crow Wing, but it's worth possibly starting on the Shell and paddling down there and then continuing your trip on Crow Wing.

Bob:

They used to take the mussel shells and make buttons out of them and there was a button factory at a town that's no longer there - Shell City. There's some markers that show where the buildings used to be so there's really not much to see in terms of any remnants of the city, but it's an interesting history to think about the entire factory that was erected there to take advantage of the mussel shells. Unfortunately it also did a lot of damage to the river.

Lynne:

There's a real nice campground right across the river from the old site of Shell City, and you're almost to the Crow Wing at that point.

Bob:

This is one of our favorite camping rivers. Very pleasant paddle, beautiful landscape, and we highly recommend it.

Thank you for joining us and good paddling.

