

Tales of Water Trails: Des Moines 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 Des Moines River.

Lynne:

The West Fork of the Des Moines – now the Des Moines River is Iowa's biggest river, but it starts in Minnesota. And it starts up on the prairie coteau, which is a region of southwestern Minnesota that's a highland, described by Joseph Nicollet who was an explorer in the 1800's. This river flows across a lot of farmland, but between the cities of Windom and Jackson it offers a really lovely wooded retreat from the farmland. Kilen Woods State Park is along this stretch, which makes a great place to stop for a rest or a picnic.

Our favorite was between Christiana Bridge, which is downstream of Windom, and Jackson. Between the two cities it's a total of about 27 miles, but starting at Christiana Bridge makes it a slightly shorter trip.

One of the issues with the West Fork of the Des Moines is water level, so you want to definitely check those water levels before you set out to paddle.

Bob:

This river was a very pleasant river to paddle. It's in the southwest corner of the state of course, and one of the rivers that we paddled in that corner of the state that did *not* flow into the Minnesota River. So it didn't have some of the characteristics that those rivers all share. It's difficult to describe the character of a river that goes through part of the state which appears, especially if you're driving by at 70 miles an hour, very similar to another area just another 50 miles down the road. But that being said, this river has kind of a quality which appealed to both of us. It's a very wooded valley, it's very fast moving, and the water is clear – it was just a very enjoyable paddle. Not difficult in terms of boat

handling skills. There's some class I. The usual safety issues of deadfalls and water levels need to be considered. But a very nice paddle. We enjoyed it.

Lynne:

There are some stretches of native tallgrass prairie that come right down to the river that you can stop and visit, with some educational signs that make a good place to stop for a break. These stretches of prairie are expanding, too. There's some restored prairie along the river. So you have the oak forest where it runs through the gorge in Kilen Woods – and it's definitely a gorge, the sides of the river rise significantly at that point – interspersed with stretches of native tallgrass prairie. And the farm fields are really not a very big part of the experience.

It's a really fun river to paddle. When you get into Jackson you're going to get out before the dam and you're going to go under a couple of bridges. There's one low bridge in Jackson where if the water were too high, you might have trouble. But other than that it's a pretty safe river to paddle.

Bob:

Yes, a river well worth trying and we urge you to get out there and enjoy it. Good paddling, thank you.