

Tales of Water Trails: Kettle 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 Kettle River.

Lynne:

The Kettle River is famous for the Banning Rapids, which are class II to class IV – pretty challenging water. But for paddlers who love a lively river and don't feel up to those challenges offered by the Banning Rapids, the Upper Kettle and the Lower Kettle are a great solution.

You can paddle up to 56 miles on the Upper and Lower together. It's class I to class II. And you've got a narrow, rocky, steep Upper and a wider, and also steep, Lower to paddle. When I talk about the Upper, I'm talking about County Road 27 down to Highway 23, which is right above the Banning Rapids. And then from Sandstone Rapids down to the St. Croix is the Lower. Both of these are beautiful stretches of river, lots of fun to paddle.

Bob:

Speaking of Sandstone, this is a city that used to have a dam. And the dam was removed, revealing what you often find behind dams that were put in, of course – where the river gradient is its steepest so that they get the greatest water power. When the dam was taken out – you can still see the scars of that dam along the edge of the river on the rock faces – there is a waterfall and a series of rapids right by the city of Sandstone that is very impressive. You'd have to be a kind of enthusiastic whitewater kayaker to want to think about taking that stretch, but you can put in your canoe or kayak right below that and have a calmer stretch from there all the way down to the end of the river.

Lynne:

Yeah, that's a class I to II and it's a lot of fun. You want to get your water levels high enough. You want to be sure that you've got enough water.

On the upper stretch, between County Road 27 and Highway 23, you can also do some canoe camping. There are a couple of nice campsites along the way which make that possible. And it's pretty wooded and remote with some beautiful rock outcrops along that stretch. On the stretch between Sandstone Rapids and the St. Croix camping's also possible, but you have to go downstream of Highway 48 for the St. Croix State Park campsites. You could do day trips by camping at Banning State Park and take a look at the wilder rapids in the process.

Bob:

The river gets faster as it descends toward the St. Croix. There are no really challenging rapids there, but sort of a continuous stretch of rapids. Very rocky – your boat will be lighter by the time you get down to the St. Croix because some of it's going to be on the rocks! But that's unavoidable, and it's one of those stretches where it's fun to make your best shot at getting down through there as smoothly as you can. Just know that you're going to bump your way down through it if the water levels are not extremely high.

Lynne:

There are a couple of ledges. One on the Upper, it's a small ledge just about a foot and a half high. And there are a couple of ledges on the Lower. Those are things you want to watch out for. There are routes around them. It's easy to avoid, but look at your map and pay attention.

Bob:

As we mentioned earlier, the Kettle is kind of legendary for Twin City paddlers who are headed up there at all times of the year, all days of the week, during the paddling season to have their fun in the Banning Rapids, but the rest of the river is not used as much. For those who are more interested in a little bit more sedate paddling, particularly in tandem canoes instead of kayaks, the Kettle offers some really great paddling from its very beginning all the way down to the St. Croix. We highly recommend it.

Lynne:

Thanks for joining us.