

Tales of Water Trails: Lake Superior

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 Lake Superior.

Lynne:

The Lake Superior State Water Trail is a magical part of Lake Superior. A group of paddlers who loved kayaking on the big lake conceived the idea of the Lake Superior State Water Trail, and in 1993, state legislation made the trail a reality. The trail is managed by the Minnesota DNR and a support group, the Lake Superior Water Trail Association. As of 2005 the trail was completed with access points, camping sites, and maps going all the way from Duluth Harbor to Pigeon Point.

Bob:

We paddled this Lake Superior water trail in two sections. The first section that I'll talk about was from Gooseberry Falls to Tettegouche, a distance of about 24 miles. In our book we divided that into three segments and depending upon your paddling ambitions you could do that in one very hard day or break it up into two or three days.

This is a very scenic part of the water trail. You go by Split Rock Lighthouse. Further up the shore you come to Beaver Bay, and not long after that is the North Shore Mining Company, a place that's had a very memorable history in the ecological, environmental history of the state of Minnesota. Back in the 1970s it was quite controversial because of the tailings that were being put into Lake Superior, and a judge ordered them to stop doing that. So it has kind of a bad name among the environmental community in Minnesota. It has been cleaned up in terms of its operations. It's still quite noticeable from the water. I personally found it rather fascinating to see this other-worldly industrial installation along the shore of Lake Superior.

Lynne:

In addition, the current owners of the company have given a section of their lakeshore as a place for kayakers to land, and they're restoring the tailings with plantings.

Bob:

Then from North Shore Mining Access up to the end of the section that we paddled up at Tettegouche State Park, it's another approximately 5 miles. Tettegouche is a beautiful park, lots of very interesting rock formations. And actually prior to getting to Tettegouche State Park you go by the Palisade Head, which is steep bluffs dropping down into the lake. There're sea caves there. Up at Tettegouche are a variety of rock formations, a sea arch, and more sea caves up there.

Lynne:

Another trip that you can count on enjoying is from Cascade to Grand Marais. This is a one-day trip. It's about 9.5 miles and it'll take you past Cascade State Park, the various cliffs and runoff areas of Cascade State Park, the mouth of the Cascade River, a waterfall at the mouth of the fall river, which also has a really nice rest area, and into the harbor at Grand Marais, a welcoming place.

Bob:

One of the biggest challenges of getting the Lake Superior State Water Trail established was getting permissions to have access and camping places along the lakeshore. A lot of the land is privately owned, and it took a lot of hard work and negotiations to get those permissions to make this a possibility. So it is possible – with the kind of safety that you need on a big body of water like Lake Superior – it's possible to paddle from Duluth up to the border between Minnesota and Canada, and to have enough campsites and access points to make it a very reasonable trip along a beautiful shoreline. We really enjoyed our trips there.

Lynne:

A really, really important thing to talk about when you're taking sea kayaking voyages on Lake Superior, even though you're traveling parallel to the shore and you're a fairly short distance from the shore, is the danger of the big lake. This is water that can kill you if you're in there without insulation for any length of time. Storms come up suddenly on the lake. You need to be experienced at sea kayaking. You need to be experienced in sea kayaking *on Lake Superior*. Always wear your life jacket, and preferably wear a wetsuit. You don't plan to be in the water, but that's the reason that you do plan for emergencies – they are unexpected. Have a map so you know where you're going to be able to take out. Take out is not always easy along the shore. If the waves are big, landing on a cobble beach can be extremely difficult, so be comfortable doing landings on a cobble beach. If you're up against cliffs you're not going to be able to land, period, and you're going to need to paddle further.

This is an exciting and wonderful water trail, but it involves a certain amount of risk, which needs to be dealt with realistically.

Bob:

On that thought of risk and safety, it's very important to learn self-rescue techniques if you're going to be a kayaker. You need to be able to flip your boat over and get back in it, and you can do that with an assisted rescue, rescue by yourself – there's a number of techniques and a lot of courses being offered by various water clubs and paddling clubs to teach those techniques, and they're really a necessity to do that.

Lynne:

Paddling the Lake Superior State Water Trail is a fantastic way to see the north shore of Lake Superior and to really appreciate the beauty that our state has up in that corner. It gives you a unique perspective on things like Split Rock Lighthouse to see them from the lake, especially if there's one of those light Lake Superior mists rising from the water.

Bob:

Yeah, it's a totally different experience being a couple hundred yards or a quarter, half mile offshore and experiencing the shoreline, as opposed to the typical north shore trip, which is you drive along Highway 61, get out and find an overlook and appreciate the lake and the rocks from that vantage point. When you're in a boat and you're down there where the water's breaking against the shore and appreciating that vantage point, it's a magical thing. So have fun, it's a great trip!