

Tales of Water Trails: Little Fork 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 Little Fork River.

Bob:

The Little Fork is another of our favorite rivers in the north country. It's the twin of the Big Fork – and I say "twin" literally because even though it's called the Little Fork, you'd think it'd have a lot less flow than the Big Fork, but they're very similarly sized rivers in terms of the flow. It's a challenging river, it's a very exciting river, class I to II rapids, one waterfall that needs to be portaged around. It has some evidence of the artifacts of humanity, as we like to think of them, in terms of some very interesting farms in that area of the state. Because farming has not worked out so well up there, there's a lot of very interesting old barns and buildings that you can see from the river, old bridges. One thing that caught my eye was some old 1930's cars that were kind of settling into the ground right next to the river – I got a bunch of wonderful photographs of those.

Lynne:

This is a great river for experienced river paddlers. You want to be comfortable in class I to II, and even high class II. You can camp along the way, but it also makes a great day trip. Good fishing – big muskies, walleye, northern pike, and a lot of small mouth bass. There are also sturgeon in the river.

The paddling that you choose should be based on whether or not you can run those rapids, because most of the rapids do not have established portage trails. One exception is Hannine Falls, which is a class IV to VI drop. There's a pretty decent portage trail on the right at that falls, but other than that, you want to be able to run the rapids and not have to portage them.

Our favorite stretch went from County Road 914 to Samuelson Park. That was a total of about 36 miles. Samuelson Park by the way is a cool place. If you paddle on a hot day you'll be very grateful to get to that well and pump up some ice-cold water.

Bob:

The Little Fork has very clean water, tannin-colored, beautiful flow over the rocks – it's just a pleasure all the way down. At one point we did find, speaking of those artifacts of humanity that I talked about earlier, there was a pipe, a big plastic drain pipe, that had been rigged up with a series of ropes and pulleys and wooden frame as a waterslide for somebody's children, which is right along the river and a lot of fun to look at.

Lynne:

They had a little pump where they pump water from the river through a hose and feed the slide. And we just wished there were kids there dropping into the river, but there wasn't anybody home at that point.

Bob:

Something else to think about in all the paddling of these rivers is that there are other rivers that may not be covered in our books or by the state maps that are well worth paddling. One to mention here is the Sturgeon River that flows into the Little Fork. It has about the same flow rate as the Little Fork. Its paddleable distance is not as long as on the Little Fork. It's class I to II, some very exciting paddling. We enjoyed that as well.

Lynne:

Thanks for joining us.