

## Tales of Water Trails: Minnesota 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 Minnesota River.

Lynne:

The Upper Minnesota River... Between Granite Falls and Redwood Falls, the Minnesota offers paddlers a quiet, often wooded refuge from the farmland of southwestern Minnesota. There are some great campsites, a close-up look at some of the oldest rocks in the world – those are 3.6 billion years old! – and a chance to fish for flathead catfish. We're talking about a 36-mile stretch between Granite Falls and Redwood Falls.

Bob:

The river is pretty placid. There are some points to watch out for though. Patterson Rapids is about 3 miles down from the 19 bridge crossing and it'll kind of surprise you. It surprised us, we did not expect too much, and as I recall the left side of the river has a significant drop. And we happened to not go over that, but it'd be very easy to be not paying attention and go over that and you could easily capsize. So beware of that one.

Lynne:

Yeah, Patterson's Rapids – actually a couple people did drown there, so it's definitely one to be aware of on a river that's otherwise quiet.

Bob:

Part of the charm of the Minnesota River is, although it's a rather placid river without a lot of exciting water, the huge and beautiful valley that you are in is quite a treat. As Lynne mentioned, there is

ancient rock in that area, and some of that rock is exposed right on the riverbanks at certain points as you go down the river.

Lynne:

And in Vicksburg Park, which is one of the Renville County Parks, there's a big rock that's called Gneiss – it's pronounced "nice" – and it is a very nice outcrop.

There's a 22-foot deep fishing hole that's formed next to one of the rock outcrops by Vicksburg Park, known locally as Big Eddie. Apparently it yields some pretty good fish.

There's another fun thing to look for in the "old department" along the river, and that's the bison bones and elk racks from long ago that wash up on the sandbars when the water levels change.

The wildlife along there is really a treat too. The white pelicans cluster at the mouth of the Yellow Medicine, which is right along Upper Sioux Agency State Park. There are warblers in the spring by the thousands; there are eagles, kingfishers and hawks.

Bob:

This is a river that's used by some high school paddlers that have taken annual trips from Montevideo to the Twin Cities. There's a group headed by a science teacher from that town that has done this trip, and he's helping to build awareness of the students for their local environment and the value of the river. The Minnesota needs some work, it needs some cleaning up, so it's a way to expose these students to the river and make them appreciate it.

Lynne:

This is one of the state's "wild and scenic rivers" and Butch Alterman – he's the high school teacher – he takes that seriously. He's also a member of Clean Up the River Environment, which is a local river action group. These people do wonderful things for the Upper Minnesota. If you think of the Minnesota River as simply a polluted river you're making a big mistake. It's a beauty, and it's a really undeveloped land to paddle through.

Bob:

And in the category of related paddling in the area, there are some rivers that are not part of the state water trail designation that are well worth considering. There's Hawk Creek and Yellow Medicine that flow into the Minnesota River almost opposite each other along the river. Both very exciting paddles. Small rivers, but some great two or three hour stretches on their final descent into the Minnesota.

Lynne:

Scalbekken County Park and Vicksburg County Park are two of the Renville County Parks. Excellent camping, really nice spots. Wildflowers in the spring - don't miss them.

Bob:

A wonderful paddle. See you out there!