

Tales of Water Trails: Mississippi 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 Mississippi River.

Bob:

The Mississippi River – what to say about such a varied paddling experience?! From Lake Itasca, where as they always say, you can almost jump across the river, down to the large dam and pool system in the southern part of the state, it offers a wide variety of paddling.

The Upper Mississippi has some surprises, other than the fact that it's very small. As it leaves Lake Itasca, about ten miles downstream from that point there's a rapids, which you would never associate with the image of the Mississippi River. There's some very nice paddling down south of Grand Rapids as you go down to Aitken. Several days of really good paddling along there. When you get down south of the Twin Cities and you get into the lock and dam and pool system, the paddling becomes quite different, and you get into the experience and the nature of the big river that most people associate with the name Mississippi.

Lynne:

We liked paddling through St. Cloud's Beaver Islands as well – that was a beautiful day trip. And going through the metro area from Boom Island Park to Hidden Falls Park – eight miles of city paddling, but at points along there, you'd think you were out in the woods because the bluffs are so wooded.

Bob:

But the city paddling has a charm all to itself. We went through the locks in the city, and never having done that before in any boat, let alone a canoe, was quite an experience. We paddled up and pushed the button on the speaker and announced that we were there, ready to go through the lock. And the lockkeeper just treated us like we were a 500-foot long barge! Well, I don't think a 500-foot long barge

could go through the lock, actually, but he treated us like we were any other boat and was very gracious to us. We were the only boat in the lock as we were lowered down. He told us to be careful not to tie up to the side, because when you descend 30 feet in a canoe you'd be hanging by –

Lynne:

You'd be hanging off the side!

Bob:

Hanging by your painter rope if you did that. But it was a very interesting experience.

Lynne:

There are beaches all along that stretch of the river in the metro area as well, which make good rest stops.

Bob:

Back to the Upper Mississippi, though, there's some great paddling and camping along there, and we had several nice campsites on that upper stretch.

Lynne:

Exploring the headwaters is really an adventure that every Minnesotan who likes to paddle should do. The headwaters of the Mississippi are one of those wild and scenic stretches that Minnesota is trying very hard to preserve. That land is part of our history and part of our natural heritage.

One caution about planning a headwaters trip. The best time to paddle this area, especially if you're going to camp and try to go all the way to Bemidji, is to paddle in May. The water is going to be high enough. The emergent vegetation will not be so tall that you can't see over it. Wild rice can grow six feet tall, and it can make finding your way through those channels an impossibility. Lots of people get lost in that marshy area and spend a long, mosquito-ey time trying to get out. So plan carefully as far as time, get a good map, and be prepared to climb up on high spots to see where you're going.

Bob:

And jumping back down to the southern part of the state, Lock and Dam 5 has some really good paddling. When you think of river paddling, of course you think of putting in and going down the river, but those pools are really pretty much like lakes – you can put in, go out and do a circle trip, and come back to the same point. So you don't need to necessarily worry about shuttling.

Lynne:

You stay out of the main channel, because that's where the barge traffic is, and you head into the flues and you're going to see wildlife galore. It's really a beautiful experience. There are little signs that'll

lead you through the flues and so you don't need to worry about getting lost. But the DNR also has some great maps to lead you through there.

Between Lock and Dam 5 and Verchota Landing, it's about a 7-mile paddle, and you'll see all that wildlife that loves to live in the Mississippi backwaters.

Bob:

You could spend years exploring the Mississippi and all its different forms. Of course starting in the northern part of the state and exiting on the southeast corner, it's a segment of the Mississippi that's close to just about everybody that lives in Minnesota.

Lynne:

Thanks for joining us.