

## Tales of Water Trails: Root 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 Root River.

Lynne:

The Root's gentle enough for beginning river paddlers, but swift and lively enough for the experienced to have a lot of fun as well. The bluff country scenery is gorgeous, trout fishing is good at confluences with little streams and near Preston, and there's plenty of public land for rest stops and camping. It's a very popular river.

Bob:

This is probably the premiere bluff country river in southeastern Minnesota. One of the attractive things about it, other than the paddling and the beautiful scenery, is the fact that there's a bike trail that runs along nearly the entire length of the river. We end our sections at Rushford, but the trail goes from Rushford up to Lanesboro, and then there's another branch that goes from Preston to Lanesboro. So you could do some bike shuttling for most of the length of the Root River.

Lynne:

This can be a day trip – it makes a great day trip – or you can camp along the way. There's some very nice DNR campsites along the way.

Things that you just can't see anywhere else but on the river include the Root River Power and Light Powerhouse. Now this is one of those relics that's hanging out on the river after it finished its useful life in 1928. It's a really interesting old powerhouse that's sort of crumbling into the river below the Eagle Bluff Environmental Center.

Bob:

The interesting story – you can't see this when you're canoeing, of course, because the dam that was created to make the impoundment for this powerhouse has been removed – but the dam is not by the powerhouse. There's a big loop in the river. The dam was built and then the water was fed through a tunnel, shortcutting this distance through the loop of the river to gain the additional elevation to provide more power. So it was quite an engineering feat. The tunnel is still there. It's evidently blocked up on both ends. Kind of an interesting history to consider as you paddle down the river.

Lynne:

The tunnel was dug by hand and with dynamite of course, but it's now a bat cave. Other wildlife you'll see along the way includes wild turkeys, kingfishers and eagles. There are a couple active bald eagle nests along the way. You'll see osprey and red-tailed hawks, blue herons and egrets. This is a very heavy wildlife area.

Bob:

You'll find spring wildflowers along the river as well under the hardwoods that grow on the bluffs. The bluffs are one of the lures, it's such a pretty part of the state. But the trout fishing is another lure, and the trout streams that feed the Root – those streams at the confluence are often a place where the trout like to hang out. So you have anglers who enjoy the river as well.

Lynne:

The trout fishing is rather legendary in this area. The limestone is what makes the water chemistry ideal for trout, and of course the water temperature has to be cool – and these conditions both exist in this area.

Bob:

If you decide you want to camp somewhere between Chatfield and Rushford, you'll find camping at about six different spots, including one that has a beautiful white sand beach.

There's a little rapids where the dam used to stand for the diversion into the powerhouse tunnel. It's a class I rapids, it's a little twisting one. Other than that you'll find primarily riffles, gravel bar riffles, which is another part of the beauty of the river. It's a sandy bottom, pretty clear water. Those trout are out there waiting for you, as are the smallmouth.

Lynne:

This is one of our favorite rivers, so get out there and enjoy it!

